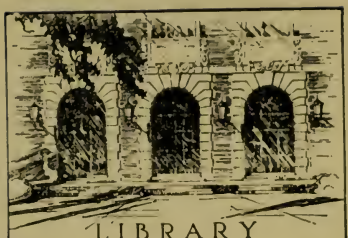

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VOL. II.

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WILD WOOD.

CHAPTER I.

"The wintry west extends his blast,
And hail and rain doth blaw;
Or the stormy north sends driving forth
The blinding sleet and snaw!
While, tumbling down, the burn comes down,
And roars frae bank to brae;
And bird and beast to covert rest,
And pass the heartless day."

SUCH a day had come to pretty Maldon, and it had not robbed it of its beauty; it looked prettier with the pure snow covering its old-fashioned buildings and low cottages, the icicles hanging to the tall forest trees, the woods quiet now, save for the robin, blackbird, and thrush. No sweet

nightingale to fill the air with its melodious trill; all was quiet, old King Winter had waved his wand over all, frozen the streams, and stopped the mill-wheel. King Christmas had come, with his jolly face and white locks, a wreath of holly and red berries round his head, holding a plum pudding in his hand. How nice it is to see him; he only comes once a year, and everyone should be pleased and ready to welcome him. It does not follow that plenty of money is required to make a happy Christmas—happiness agrees very well with poverty, because no one need ever be so poor as to not have a shelter or a little fire. And then suppose the room is bare of furniture, sit on the floor; then if there be no plum pudding or roast beef, eat bread, there is always plenty of that to be got, and cheap too. But how is it we hear doleful tales of no fire, no bread, no anything? Because that which ought to be appropriated to necessities goes to buy gin, whisky, or

rum, and money will not procure everything unless there be a good supply of it. During the hot summer days it is not so bad because there is no fire, warm clothes, or a house needed, they can almost do without. But when Jack Frost comes with his jolly face, how then? He pinches their toes, fingers, noses, and ears. Why? because they are not ready to receive him. There is supposed to be a man at the head of every family, and it is his place to work, and if he cannot earn sufficient let the wife turn to, and each child, as it gets old enough. Then if they cannot keep themselves theirs is the fault. There is work for everyone who wants it, and poverty is nothing but the just result of indolence, and those who won't work should not eat.

So the people in the village were making preparations, chains of Christmas decorated the shops, and everything had a piece of holly stuck into some part of it. At the corner of the Dork-

ing-road was Mrs. Collins' shop, and some pretty hats with pheasant's plumes in them stared you in the face, while Bushcut, the draper, informed the public, by means of a card in the window, that he had "a choice assortment of Christmas presents; card cases, musical albums, work boxes, scent and jewel boxes, etc., etc." His young men wore mittens to protect their chilblains, and the gas was lighted early in the afternoon. At Partoon's, the butchers, there was a perpetual scurry going forward. The cows, sheep, and pigs had all bunches of Christmas and pink paper roses growing out of their ears. And one afternoon a tall, good-looking, fair gentleman, was seen tenderly carrying a prime sucking pig to his pony carriage.

Everyone was busy and light hearted; young ladies went searching for misteltoe, and came back with rosy cheeks and sparkling eyes, to find the rest of the happy family dressing the rooms,

laughing, and mounted on stepladders, while someone below occasionally pinched their legs.

By this time the family at "Wild Wood" had one more member added to it, Julius Drever. Since he has been reserved to the last in all probability you are a little curious to have him described, and discover for yourself what he is like? I did not keep him because he is the handsomest, he is not my *beau ideal* of a man, he is not a "tit bit." Julius was a good looking man (indeed not any of the Drevers were ugly), he was dark, and like Judy, his hair was perfectly straight, unlike Durill's, as also was his face, which was longer and paler, with only a pair of long dark whiskers. His eyes were searching, and an immensity of humour shone in them. His mouth was decided, but the chin less flexible, and he had a provoking way of smiling at one side of his mouth, while everyone else was in roars. He was tall, slight, and wiry.

He had only come down the day before, and required posting up in all that had taken place since he was last there. He left Durill and May no peace, he would come into their snuggery, and when he went Judy would follow. Since Gilbert had shown in his true colours, poor Judy seemed to cling to clever Julius, perhaps because he had borne patiently with the spoilt Gilbert's faults, so she always followed Julius, and he followed May and Durill.

Great Durill groaned and stared helplessly at May; there sat Julius, cross questioning them as if they had been witnesses in some great case.

"And you mean to tell me no one has got married, eh?"

"No, not anyone!"

"Awfully slow you people must be, the place is getting quite stagnant."

"Yes, to you, you cockney; but what do you expect to take place in a country village?"

"Heaps of things. Births, marriages, deaths, fights, accidents, fires, one or two cases of drowning, suicides, and no end of elopements!"

"Dear me, Julius, then there would be no one left in the place."

"There would be you, Judy. That reminds me why on earth don't some of you girls get off? Here are three of you, and not one even engaged?"

"Ah, don't please harp upon that string, I hoped it was worn out, but it seems not. You should reserve your eloquence for Lois. Judy is a confirmed old maid, and marriage is not in my line!"

"It will be out of your reach in good truth soon, May; you are getting to look old, my dear!"

"Durill, protect me. I am getting picked to pieces."

"Well, I shall be very glad of the pieces,

May. I say, Julius, we'll have to try 'whose best man,' as the north fellows say, if you persist in teasing my pet so. Don't you see we can't get on with our work for your ceasless chatter; and this is not our holiday time like yours."

"So you want me to go, is that it? Now I must say I think you are very rude to me, both of you; why cannot you take a holiday, Friday is Christmas Day?"

"I know that, and it makes all the more work, because the regular business commences again on Monday. Is that letter ready, May?"

"Yes, there it is near your elbow. I don't recollect whether the man's name is James or John, but I daresay it will find him all the same?"

"Ah, yes, that won't matter; and I hope he won't bother me any more."

"I say, good people, I saw Captain Hardwick, this morning, at the post, and he is rather cut up about George!"

"About George? What has he done this time?"

"Done, why by some wonderful mismanagement he missed the 'Princess Alice!'"

"Missed the 'Princess Alice?'" ejaculated Judy, "how ever did he do that? he left here on the Friday?"

"Yes, so Captain Hardwick told me; but he went skylarking with another fellow, and when they got back the regiment had sailed, the tide answered an hour earlier or something, and these two fellows were off, and the ship went without them."

"But the cool part of it is, he never wrote to his brother till yesterday."

"A pretty fine how-do-you-do, 'pon my word. George is a wild fool; he will be tried, of course. And how does he intend getting out there?"

"Oh, he is on his way now; he sailed yesterday from Liverpool in the 'Sea Gull.' He will

arrive about a week after his regiment. His brother was in an awful state of mind about it, I can tell you."

"And no wonder; really brothers are an awful nuisance when they are not steady!"

"Come now, Dame Judy, all are not alike, and we cannot have the sweets of this life without some of its bitters. But since we are talking about 'black sheep,' I may as well tell you that I had a visit from Gilbert on Saturday."

"What did he want?"

"What he always wants, Durill—money."

"Did you give him it?"

"No, I did not."

"And what did he say?"

"That he must pawn his watch. It seems that his trolloping wife's brother has got tired of assisting. He dresses his sister in fine dresses and hats—astonishing things, I assure you—and that he considers ought to be sufficient. I quite

agree with the little man; indeed, I think he has been a good-natured little fool, to go on helping so long. But I suspect he has come to the end of his resources, and finds there is nothing to show for it, and they still with their mouths wide open. Gilbert is a rare hand at sinking money, I must say."

"It is really disgraceful. I feel almost as much ashamed as if I had been taking Mr. Ryde's money myself. But it is to be hoped Gilbert will find his level now. I thought he intended going abroad."

"That grand idea has died a natural death, May. He only said it, I fancy, out of bravado; he thought Madam and Judy here would cling tight round his legs when the parting came, and throw their money and jewels at his feet. And I daresay they would, too, if the chance offered, eh, Judy?"

But Judy vouchsafed no reply, and Julius went on, pulling his long whiskers—

"I fancy this time, wise people, that Crispin is rather 'cock-a-hoop.' He has got on the right side of Madam, which, to me, is a very bad sign. Have you had any scenes, may I ask?"

Durill stretched out one great leg, and gave May a poke under the table. She looked up, a troubled expression on her face, and they stared into each other's eyes for an instant. Then May looked down again; those two could talk with their eyes, and Durill understood that he was not to repeat the story of "Gipsy," but listen to what shrewd Julius had to say.

"Well," demanded that gentleman, "am I to have any answer?"

No one spoke. Judy because she did not know the rights of the story. It had been hushed up, and few knew of May's loss. Durill because he

felt too angry to say little; so, as usual, it fell to May's lot.

"What is it you want to know, Julius?"

"Have you had any of Crispin's crackers?"

"One or two; but now it is my turn to question. What do you want to know for?"

"Because I don't quite understand him this time. He has quite altered; there is something sneaking about him, and he is so inclined to be cheeky when you speak to him, that it gives me the impression he has something to conceal, and intends to keep one off in case their eyes are too sharp."

"Yes, I too think he has changed; but perhaps he is getting grave. He has been helping Mark during Dr. Tinley's absence."

"Indeed! Well, he sha'n't walk round me—mother's pet or no mother's pet—that's certain."

"Julius, don't get quarrelling with him, pray."

"No fear, Judy; I don't intend to quarrel with the lad. But we have had one mother's pet, and I think that ought to be sufficient."

"You are quite right, Julius," said Durill, "but there is no remedy for it that I can see. I have had several passes with him already. If we could only make him wake some morning with dark hair and a Drever, instead of a Benton face, we might have a chance; as it is, Madam will ruin him, just like she did Gilbert, and we cannot any of us help it."

"Truly spoken, Sir Durill, we are told that 'too much learning maketh a man mad.' I wonder what too much beauty does? Makes them half daft in my opinion."

"Why did you call Durill Sir, just now, Julius?"

"For the same reason that we sometimes call you Lady May. Durill there just puts me in mind of a portly knight of old—one of those

colossal statues one sees standing, javelin in hand, on the battlements of some ancient castle; and you, May, look like a lady who ought to wear a black velvet dress and diamonds, and lean from a balcony bidding adieu to your lord and master as he canters away on his coal black steed to the wars. And if it should happen—

> 'That back from the red field thy gallant come never,
> In death he'll remember that she who had filled
> His last stirrup-cup was his true maid ever.'

Then you must retire into a convent, and slowly pine away. You would look capital as a Lady Abbess, May."

"Julius, you have astonished us all. I had no idea you had such a vivid imagination."

"Ah! Judy, my dear, see the disadvantage I have laboured under. My hopes were nipped in the bud, my education was so frightfully neglected that my genius never had an opportunity of developing itself. But, seriously, I insist that

if ever May has a chance of going to a fancy ball she must go as 'Sister Mary Magdalene.' That calm, resigned face of yours, and dignified bearing is just the thing, May."

"Very well, Julius, I won't forget, should the time ever come," replied May, laughing.

"Now, dear tormented mortals, I am going to relieve you of my presence. Come, Judy, let us make a tour of the extensive establishment, and perhaps we shall discover more secret hiding places. I recollect, when a small fellow in cock-tail petticoats, how I used to poke my fingers into every crevice, in the hope that part of the wall would slide back and reveal to my infantine eyes some astonishing spectacle."

He walked out of the room, dragging Judy after him.

"What a difference it makes having Julius at home, eh, Durill?"

"Yes, love, a great difference; he is a nice

fellow, and very clever. I don't know whether I told you, but the other day, while going up to town, a gentleman got in at Ewell, and we commenced talking. He told me how he was teased about some estate of a ward of his, and how cleverly he was extricated by Julius Drever. He praised Julius highly, and said he was the rising man of the day. He related several of Julius's droll speeches and sharp tricks, and I can tell you I felt not a little proud of my brother, May."

"How pleasing, to be sure. Dear Julius! I am so glad. Did you tell the gentleman he was your brother?"

"Yes, at the very last, I was so delighted. I wish Gilbert would buckle to, and I am rather afraid of Crispin."

"So am I, Durill, and after hearing Julius's opinion I feel doubly so; because Julius sees a great way, and very clearly. I do wish Crispin was settled. I wonder where papa will set him up?"

"Well, he must finish his time out first of all, and then I daresay something will be found. But it won't be a grand West End practice, and that is Crispin's desire. The Squire told me he would do nothing of the kind—he intended him to work. Old Tinley will be retiring soon, and then there would be an opening."

"But do you think Mark and Crispin would work well together? I am afraid not; they are so different, and in the village they would be constantly thrown together, else it would be a good thing for Crispin."

"Yes, there is always a 'but' in everything. Well, we must let to-morrow take care of itself; when it comes there is time enough."

"Yes, and it is sure to come already lined for us, and we shall only have to follow them. Are you ready to leave off, Durill?"

"Yes, dear; do you want me?"

"Only I want to go into the village to get

some Christmas presents for the children, and I thought perhaps you would come with me."

"Of course I will; you go and get ready, and I will follow you in a second."

"Oh! I sha'n't take two minutes to put on my hat and jacket, so I need not go before you. I am no Lois, you know."

"No, that you are not; she never gets ready under twenty minutes."

CHAPTER II.

When Judy and Julius left the snuggery, they bent their steps to the nursery.

Julius was like Durill, fond of little people, and good-natured to them. They were very fond of Uncle Doolius, as Evelyn called him, but he did not rival Durill. Little Evelyn always made a point of flying as fast as her short legs would carry her to Uncle Durill when anything went wrong. There up out of the reach of Parker, Nurse Joyce, and everyone else, clinging round his neck, and pressed quite close to him, she would pour into his ever ready ear the story of her woes, and be soothed and carried about till quite

calmed and the tears all dried. After one of those quiet talks with Uncle Durill and Aunty May, Evelyn would return quite sweet tempered, and beg Parker's pardon, and promise to be a good girl. One morning about eight o'clock there was a short, sharp scream, and the sound of little feet going as quickly as possible, while the corridor echoed with cries of "Untle Durill! Untle Durill!" Everyone recognised Evelyn's voice, and the occupants of the rooms at that end appeared at their doors.

There, running at express speed, was a little plump Cupid with golden hair floating in the wind, unbrushed and uncombed. It was Evelyn, with not a stitch to her back, not even a stocking on. Behind came Parker, a chemise in one hand and a towel and sponge in the other. "Miss Evelyn, come here my dear, come here!" But no, Miss Evelyn made straight for Durill's door, at which he was standing like everyone else, in

his shirt sleeves, in astonishment. She stretched up her little arms to him, and of course was lifted up amid much laughter from the lookers-on, and carried into his room and the door shut.

"What is it, Parker?" inquired May of the blushing girl.

"I don't know, Miss May; I had just finished bathing her, and she flew off, and I could not catch her."

May walked across to Durill's door and knocked.

"Is that you, May?"

"Yes, Durill."

"Come in."

May entered, and found poor little Evelyn sobbing bitterly in Durill's arms, and him hushing and comforting her.

"What is it, darling little one? There, don't cry, they sha'n't have you, my pet; tell me what has grieved you?"

She told him, sobbing convulsively, that Parker

said he had gone. "And me tum to see. Don't do away, Uncle Durill!"

The dear little thing was dreadfully distressed; her little heart was almost bursting with grief at the thought of parting with Durill, and the big man was affected too. He assured his little pet that he would not go away, and kissed and hugged her.

"Poor child! it shows how she loves you, Durill."

"Yes, dear little trot. May, just get Parker to bring her clothes here, I can dress her, and if I can't you can—she sha'n't go back at present."

May laughingly complied with his request, and Evelyn was dressed by Uncle Durill, with Aunt May's assistance. It was a pretty sight to see how tenderly his great hands put the wee garments on her little body, she standing on the bed quite happy the while, and begging very hard to be allowed to "seep in dis bed wid you!" to

which Durill made no decided objection, but laughed a good deal, and when the process of attiring was over, Miss Evelyn entered the nursery in triumph on Uncle Durill's shoulder.

Julius proposed going to see the little folks, and found them seated at the table with trains, carts and horses, waggons with dolls in, arranged in rows.

"Well, what are you playing at?"

"A fooneral, uncle Doolius," answered Evelyn, wheeling round and upsetting the tail of the procession, which Ivo commenced to set up again without one murmur.

"A funeral? bless my soul! a lively game I should say. Can't you think of something else to play?"

"We have just had a wedding, Uncle Julius," answered Ivo, "and Evelyn wanted a funeral."

"And pray where did you see a funeral, Evelyn?"

"I saw Mr. Picer's fooneral, but I have lost the dolly that made Mr. Picer, Uncle Doolius, he was so nice and fine."

Julius looked in astonishment at Judy and Parker, but both were laughing too much to offer any explanation, but sensible Ivo came to the rescue with a perfectly grave face.

"She means Mr. Spicer, Uncle Julius, and the dolly that is lost was very thin and tall, like Mr. Spicer."

"Ah! indeed; I understand. And who makes you these dolls, Evelyn?"

"Parker and old nurse, out of rags. Me want a sveep, but Parker dot no black stuff, and she can't make him, and that's why I have dot no Mr. Picer."

"I am afraid they don't sell either sweeps or Mr. Spicers in the village, or I should be happy to buy them for you, Evelyn. But what should

you like for a Christmas present? Sit on my knee, so, and tell me."

Evelyn put one pink finger in her mouth and studied the carpet attentively for a second or two. Then she raised her head with a jerk and said—

"A dum, please, Uncle Doolius."

"A drum! but that is not a little girl's toy. Can't you decide on something better?"

"Me *would* like a dum." And the lovely eyes looked so beseechingly Julius could not resist them.

"Very well, dear, a drum you shall have. And now, Ivo, what is your special desire?"

"A box of tools, please."

"Very good, only mind you don't cut one of your fingers off, my boy."

"Who is holding court here?" asked May at the door.

"I am," replied Julius. "We have been assisting at a most dismal ceremony—a funeral."

"Dear me, that is dismal. Whose funeral was it, Sophy's or Walter's?"

"Mr. Picer's," announced Evelyn.

"Mr. Spicer's!" answered May, laughing merrily. "Why, that is rather too near home, my darling. I had rather you had confined your play to your dollies."

"Well, me married you."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Julius, smiling, "you have been busy to-day, married Aunty May and buried Mr. Spicer."

"I am going into the village; do you want anything, Judy?"

"No, May, thank you; I think not."

"Parker, will you get me a bit of that ribbon? I will try and match it. Do you want anything?"

"Yes, if you please, Miss May; some darn-

ing cotton, No. 6, and some small buttons, if you please."

"You had better also give me a button, or show me the size. You can bring them to my room. I must go and get ready, or I shall be late."

"Who is going with you, May," asked Judy.

"Durill, and I said I would be ready in an instant; but this nursery is such a temptation."

It did not take May a minute to put on her hat and seal jacket, and Durill had not to complain of being kept waiting. He was ready at the side door, watching the gambols of a large black Newfoundland and a little white curly dog.

"Quiet, Rio, don't be rough, sir."

"Poor little Snow Ball, you get many rolls over. How well Rio looks, Durill."

"Yes, famous. Take my arm, May, or, as Julius says, 'Hook on;' it will keep you warmer. Bodies retain heat longer than anything else, and it is keen this afternoon."

They walked along, talking and laughing, the two dogs racing on in front, and many a roll did poor little Snow Ball get from the paw of great Rio. Every sound came distinctly borne on the frosty air. A sheep dog, miles away on the other side of a hill, could be heard yelping. Now and then scraps of one of the comic songs sung at the last Penny Readings would be whistled or sung by an invisible being, followed immediately by the ring of an axe, clearly showing that the individual with a taste for music was chopping wood. Then the bleating of some sheep as they wandered round and round their pen in yonder field, or the creak and roll of some barrow as it trundled along the hard road. Durill and May went down the foot path, it was nearer than the carriage drive, it cut off a good piece. And moreover there was a seat on this path to rest weary legs, because it was so steep. To the right the ground dropped, and showed the

river, curling its way amid the woods, while a distant line of railway had been cut through the pretty valley and past a rustic red cottage. When the train came along it always gave a long loud shriek, and then dived into a tunnel that lay under Wild Wood Hill. May asked Durill to stay a second, she always liked to stand at that point and gaze down upon the woods and up as they rose at either side. Quantities of rabbits and hares capered about on the slope, the snow showing their little footprints, and where they had stopped to nibble a bit off the trees. The dogs had rushed on, and their bark came strong and clear, they were scudding along rolling over and over. The birds were tame and appeared at every step, one thrush, an elderly bird, came and hopped on the narrow path before them, and looking up with his bright eyes whistled beautifully. May regretted she had not remembered to bring some bread in her pocket; and the

handsome fellow seemed to understand her, for he flew to a holly hard by and commenced a contented attack upon the clusters of ripe red berries. Further down there were two or three seats, placed under a grove of fine old trees, upon whose stout trunks many names were carved, and they kept getting added to, some by weak hands and a delicate penknife, so in all probability the cuts not being very deep, they are worn away by this time. Time works wonders, and when it extends to years it is almost impossible to turn back through the long months. Whatever happens Time never fails to trudge onwards with heavy remorseless footsteps; on some the print is light, on others heavy. He straps to the backs of young people burdens that almost bend them double, he takes his scythe and hews down someone beloved, and goes trudging on again. He forgets no one in his march and shows no mercy. Some of those

who cut their names on the tree by the seat long ago, have lines on their brows, and round their mouths now a careworn expression, and a great feeling of age creeping over them. They have had troubles and struggles, and carry about with them the impress of Father Time's hand. They are fighting bravely with the hope of resting some day; it is a dim foggy hope, a little hope, yet how inexpressibly sweet—it dances across the waste before them like a sunbeam. It is the hope of a small cottage in a pretty garden where roses and hollyhocks grow, in the land where nightingales sing, where they can rest from their toils on the fruits of their labour. Perhaps this hope will never be realised, the eyes never see what they hunger for; perhaps the busy hands may lie passive before that day, and the workers be at rest. Then like their names cut upon that friendly tree, where the crows held council and brought up their families. Their

memories will wear out, but they will not give up the fight, they will try on, still hoping for victory. And if success never comes and with it the cottage, if they watch the sun rise each morning and set each night, and still no success, they will be gaining not losing, because they will be "A day's march nearer home." "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

There's a distinct promise of reward for those deserving. Now who will throw away the chance because success does not come to them in this world? If you do not get it now you will in heaven, so let each worker take heart and work on—

> "The consecrated cross I'll bear,
> Till death shall set me free;
> And then go home my crown to wear,
> For there's a crown for me!"

Durill and May walked on, lightening the way with pleasant wholesome chatter. The frosty

bracing air made them feel almost as frisky as the dogs, only it would never have done for them to go frolicking and rolling about. They were nearly opposite the Grove, when May asked—

"Shall we call and see the Calverts, Durill?"

May was perfectly unconscious that the big brown eyes had been strained in that direction for the last ten minutes.

"Shall we, Durill?"

"I think it is rather too late, May; let me see. Yes, it is after four, perhaps we had better not to-day."

He did not tell her that his superior height had enabled him to catch a glimpse of a small person walking along to the right as they came through the gates of the lodge, and alas! their way lay to the left.

Durill Drever was not a young man, and therefore did not let the public know exactly his feelings; he could keep them well down, and he

was the last man in all the world to "wear his heart on his sleeve." I am not going to pretend that this was the first time of asking, that he had never been in love before, I daresay he had half a dozen times, if not more. But still while quietly smoking, he would think about it, turn it over in his mind, put her in the balance with some beautiful elegant "girl with a spider waist and Grecian face." Pull her poor little bit of beauty all out of shape, and then recollect she could not speak French, German, or Italian, and was only a poor hand at playing and singing, and her nose was a decided pug, and her neck short.

Then after a long draw at the pipe, would come the thought, "But she is just the sort of girl I should like for my wife, I have seen lots handsomer and finer, but she is just what I want her to be." And Ruby would figure in his mind's eye with all her schoolgirl airs, the retrimmed

bonnets, and lengthened dresses, sitting demurely before him in church, while the choir, assisted by the Rector's daughters, made frantic efforts to wade through the "Hallelujah chorus." At those times Ruby stood a very good chance, for Durill was a good, kind hearted man, but of the flesh, and what temptations and evils is not "Flesh" heir to.

CHAPTER III.

MAY went to Bushcuts, and made her purchases, while Durill went to the surgery to see Mark, and promised afterwards to call for her at the house, where she was going to see Minnie. Coming out of the shop, she encountered Captain Hardwick and Chandos Stilwell. They had been for a walk, they told her. Captain Hardwick lcoked serious enough when she asked about George.

"I was so sorry to hear that he missed his sbip, but perhaps it will not be such a dreadful misdemeanour."

"It will, I fear, Miss May. An officer is in

such a responsible position, you see, and I had got George promoted, and the higher you are the more is expected of you."

Just as they reached Dr. Calvert's door, Durill appeared with Mark at the surgery.

"It is no use going in, May; Minnie is in town, and will not be home for an hour, Mark tells me."

"I am very sorry. Mark, are you feeling well, you don't look it?"

He did not, indeed, and he leant on the gate wearily.

"Yes; I believe so, May, but I am so tired; I have had no dinner yet, and I think I will do without it to-day, and take tea instead when Minnie comes home."

"Oh, no, Mark, that is bad for you; you ought to have some at once. If you will go in now I will take a cup with you."

"Tea at half-past four, Miss May!" exclaimed Chandos Stilwell.

"Yes, Mr. Stilwell," laughed May. "I am a great tea-drinker. They call me the 'washer-woman' at home, because I can take a cup at any time."

Durill saw through May's ruse. She did not want the tea, but she noticed Mark's pale face, and thought if she said she wanted some he could not be so rude as to refuse her.

Durill smiled.

"Well, are you going to give us this coveted tea, Mark? It certainly would not be a bad idea this cold afternoon."

"By all means. You fellows had better come, too, if it is not quite out of your line."

They agreed, and all followed Mark into the house.

"Some tea, Eliza, at once."

"Mark, I am going up to see the children; I will be down by the time the tea is in."

"All right, May."

May ran lightly up, and softly opened the nursery door. The nurse was sleepily sewing an apron, and the children were perfectly neat, but looked dispirited and fractious. The tears were still wet on little Arnold's cheeks. He had been indulging in a smart warfare with pretty Miss Lucy, who, mounted high on a chair by the table, reigned supreme over the collection of toys, most of them headless, legless, or tailless, and of which she determinedly refused to give Arnold one. The cheerless aspect of the room, and the tired looking children sent a chill to May's heart; it was so different to the nursery at Wild Wood. That room was never dull, the children had plenty of visitors and change. They roamed about pretty much, and jumped and romped till the ceiling of the room underneath was one mass of cracks and great pieces of plaster fell now and then.

Minnie Calvert held to that ridiculous and in-

experienced theory that the place for children was the nursery, where they were to be kept like little state prisoners, always neat and not too noisy. The nursery is the place for children, but not all day. Change is necessary for their health and spirits. They are only fools who expect children to be amused with the same thing for ever. If you want a sickly, nervous, delicate, peevish little girl, keep her in the nursery in a pretty dress, and give her plenty of doll rags and a pair of scissors. Then when the little "miss" comes into the room for the allowed half-hour she will be a perfect little doll, and just about as animated and intelligent. She will despise a doll that has not a French bonnet on, and as time goes by you will find her mounted on a chair admiring herself at the glass, and tying new styles with her hair and thinking about her next new dress, which if not made exactly according to her taste will produce a violent fit of weeping.

Lucy Calvert was a small tyrant, the image of her mother, and tyrannized over little Arnold to her heart's content. The boy was of a peaceful, contented disposition, had such a thing been possible with a vain, cross, little sister, a stuck-up nurse, and an indifferent mother. Such a thing not being possible, he was fast growing into a selfish, bad-tempered child; just the child to make a head-strong, dogged boy, and then would come the time for the cane. Their mother considered them a "bore," and thought she had performed her duty when she procured them a "highly respectable nurse, with five years' character," and dressed them expensively and fashionably.

But she had no idea she was on the wrong track; she meant very well, and it was no use trying to show or explain her error to her, hysterics invariably coming to her aid when the argument got warm. Alas! there are too many

Minnies in the world ; I don't know what to say to justify its being so, but it is. I can only think that God in the goodness of His heart and the fullness of His mercy, will not deny them the blessing of children, unfit as they are of them, because He foresees that they will be the only link between them and their husbands after a short time has passed by. How much smiling misery do we find in genteel society? Husbands and wives come to church together because it is the "proper thing," live under the same roof together, because it would "cause such a talk if they separated." And yet they are as far apart in heart and mind as if one was in England and the other in South America. They married in haste, they thought themselves smitten, they did not consider whether their dispositions and tastes would agree. Love cannot stand the test of years without companionship, and how can there be companionship between two people totally un-

like in every respect? What can be more awful than to be chained to a man for life with whom you have not one subject in common? Cannot exchange a single idea; either receive his or give your confidence? Nothing can be worse; it is just drawing on an existence, and the man and woman who are doing that have the clearest possible conception of what hell is like, for it is the next thing akin to it. There is some absurd notion that 'Marry first, and then love will come after.' It never will—it never did. God help the girl who gets married under that impression; there awaits her a life one could not wish for a dog; if the love is not there before marriage it will not come after; indeed, there ought to be a good stock to commence with, for a great deal is too frequently lost while making the journey of life.

"Marriage is thought too lightly of by many young people; it is regarded by some girls as the

next step after leaving school—they unite all their charms and forces in the one great effort—namely, to get married. Beyond that their mind is a blank, they have no track to follow, no resources to fall back upon, and they go groping through life meaningless, discontented women, having discovered, when too late, that they had married the wrong man. Marriage is a serious question, one in which a woman is required to deal honestly with her own heart, and to put away from her all temptations, such as riches, position, able to please oneself (which, by the way, is a mistake). Let nothing tempt you to marry but true love. It is one of the trials God sends His children; He wishes them to choose between two things, and He watches the issue with interest, and when they resist temptation and choose wisely, He is well pleased. Marriage is what a gentleman once said to a friend in the train, 'A matter which requires serious con-

sideration.' He considered it well, and I hope he has chosen wisely, happily, and well, and that no doubt ever crosses his mind. That no shadow of the past—the dim outline of a face—ever comes between him and his wife. I hope that he has little fingers to stroke his face, little arms to cling round his neck, and that he can call them—mine. I never did him wrong, I only erred in loving him too well; I could not wish him harm. An invisible something sprung up between us, and pushed us apart, and I am wandering about miserable and lonely, suffering sometimes keenly. The hand of God is in everything; I suppose His hand was in that. And if an earnest wish and prayer will avail anything, he is a happy man."

After I heard that speech I understood what Thackeray meant when he said, "Love is an hour with us, it is all day and all night with a woman."

The above extract is an instance of that; to read of such a thing is one thing, to see it in

real life is another. In every-day life one does not expect to meet with romance, yet some of the most practical, active, busy creatures in the world have a romance woven in with their life, a skeleton that pops out and looks them in the face during the pauses from toil, that no one can prevent. In many cases the restless activity peculiar to some people is only the result of a blight, the rebound of a strong mind and true heart after a stunning blow. The love will not die out, so they set up a course of employment to keep it in subjection, and they go on day by day taking up whatever comes in their way, and doing it, and caring just as much about their old love as ever. It is a rare thing to find unselfish love, love like that girl's, a scrap of whose confidence I have just written. But I have not a single atom of ridicule in my mind; I feel as if I were dealing with a sacred thing when speaking of that girl's pure, unselfish love. To see her

threading her way through the world, wearing a cheerful face, never repining, ready to help anyone and everyone, loving him as much as ever in her heart of hearts, and forgetting her own trouble in the hope that he is married and happy, drawing pretty little homely pictures of "peace and plenty" with him in the middle, is a lesson to be remembered. She is his widow to all intents and purposes, without the "weeds." One does not find women often who love so, and it is a blessing; one could not wish it for their own sakes. Yet it is a pity there is so little of the genuine article; a reform is sadly wanted, but I am convinced it must commence on the female side if it is ever to effect any good.

At sight of May the children started up, and hung round her.

"Who would like to go down with me, I wonder?"

"I should—I sud!" both exclaimed at once.

"Then I am sure nurse will spare you gladly, so come along?"

She caught little Arnold up in her arms, and Lucy, vain little puss, went to nurse to have her petticoats pulled out, and when that was done followed.

The tea had just made its appearance, and May, smiling, said—

"See, I have brought you something better than tea!"

"Hallo, little chap!" exclaimed Durill. "What a fine little man he is, Mark! Put him down, May, dear."

"Yes, he is a bonny little fellow," answered Mark, whose face had quite lighted up at sight of his children; "but I wonder what mamma would say if she found you running wild down here."

Arnold jabbered something, which, not being over intelligible, is useless recording, and Lucy was otherwise engaged, and never heard. She

had sidled up to Captain Hardwick, and opened a perfect battery of infantine wiles and arts, much to his amusement. She invited him to look at her pretty shoes, and her dress, and then with a great sigh, told him she should like very much to sit on his knee.

Captain Hardwick smiled in his usual grave, quiet manner, and Durill grinned all his face over, and thought of his dear, fat, sturdy little pet, Evelyn, who, instead of acting the "little miss," would have said—

"Vill you pay wid me?"

"Mark, are you not going to drink your tea?"

"Yes, May, after you have given me some more cream. The children look well, don't you think so?"

"Yes, only I fancy they would be the better for more air and change. The nursery is rather a dull room I think, and they are apt to get cheerless when so much in it."

"That is precisely my opinion; but Minnie won't hear to it, and insists they are kept there."

"You had better send them to spend the day with our children, Mark; they would get a grand romp."

"Yes, do, Mark. Tell Minnie to send them directly after breakfast!" exclaimed May.

"Thank you, May, I will not forget. Is it snowing, Stilwell? It looks very gloomy."

"No, not yet; but we shall have a heavy fall presently."

"Is that certain, Mr. Stilwell? If so, I had better be making the best of my way home. Come, Durill, are you ready?"

"Oh, Miss May, it will not snow before night. Pray don't run away so soon. Chandos is a complete old woman as regards the weather."

"Nay, nay, Hardwick; I fancy Stilwell is right. We are going to have a fall, and a stiff one, too, so we will go, May."

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"Then I think as we all came in together it is as little as we can do to go out together. Now, Chandos, are you ready?"

"Quite."

The babies were kissed, and left with their papa, with whom, no doubt, they would enjoy a good game before their mamma returned. "When the cat's away the mice will play."

CHAPTER IV.

Scarcely had May and Durill got ten yards from Mark's house, than they saw Julius coming towards them at a slinging trot, an invention of his to keep warm. His hands were shoved down to the bottom of the pockets in his long top coat, and his mouth was pursed up into a sort of funnel, through which his breath came in a stream.

"Steady, Julius, my boy! Where are you bound for? You looked uncommonly like a kettle in the distance."

"Complimentary, by Jove! But I should very

much like to know how you draw the likeness, Sir Durill."

Durill, of course, was laughing, and it was a few seconds before he could get his lips to cover the strong white teeth, then he replied—

"Why, there was a jet of smoke coming from your mouth, and it reminded me of May's kettle when it is singing and hissing on the hob; but where are you going to at this hour?"

"Why, to get 'a dum!' as commanded by that bewitching small tyrant, Evelyn. I left her in a state of excitement better imagined than described, and until the coveted 'dum' turns up, I had rather Parker had her than me. And now permit me to inquire what you have been about? Really, you two might be man and wife!"

"How so?"

"Why, because you always set off together, and take such pleasure in each other's society, and never seem to want anyone else's. But this

is not the sort of weather to stand cooling one's heels, so say your say one of you."

"Well, I wanted some presents for the children, and wanted Durill to accompany me. We made our purchases, and then met Captain Hardwick and Chandos Stilwell, and we all went into Mark's and had a refreshing cup of tea there, said adieu, and here we are. Now are you satisfied, Mr. Curiosity?"

"Quite, Lady May, and where are those two fellows?"

"Hardwick and Stilwell turned into Billinghurst's to get their hair cut, I believe," answered Durill. "But most likely you will overtake us, Julius, so we will not stand any longer. Here, Rio, Snowball! Where are those dogs gone to?"

"They are not far off, I saw them turn up by the church; go on by all means, I sha'n't be long after you. That's a stunning hat, May!"

"I am pleased you like it, Julius," laughed

May, "it cost rather much; felt ones always do, I suppose. Come, Durill, my feet are aching."

"Are they? poor girl! The walk will soon warm them. Look alive, Julius."

"All right; if you meet any alarming personages, shout, and I'll hurry up. But I forgot, you are a match for six ordinary fellows, Sir Durill, so 'get you gone, before the shades of night come on.' Quite poetical, eh, May?"

"Quite—the frosty air has sharpened your wits."

"Yes, I think you could manage half-a-dozen men, Durill," continued May, as they walked briskly along, "you are an immense fellow."

Durill smiled.

"I recollect when I was a lad at Eton, how I used to polish off some of the big snobs. I thrashed one fellow (he is Lord Hopwood now), one time till he actually yelled, great cur."

"What for, Durill?"

"Because he had been very cruel to a half-starved stray dog, and I chanced to see him. But he has never forgotten it, and never will, I don't suppose."

"There," exclaimed May, "it is twenty minutes to six, Durill, there's the engine from Dorking going to bring the express down from Epsom; we had better make haste."

May was correct, it was twenty minutes to six, and the engine was cutting its way through the thick gloom, and shooting sparks and jets of red fire up into the leaden sky, that seemed every moment ready to drop with the weight of snow it carried, or frozen water.

"By jingo, we shall have a fall to-night, I never saw the heavens so heavy, did you, May?"

"No; and look at those poor sheep in that pen, they are bleating because they are so cold. They never rest one instant; they are as bad as

'Tasmanian Devils.' If they don't take them in they will be dead by morning, poor sheep."

"Yes, but I see a figure coming along by that hedge, no doubt he has come to fetch them."

They walked along, and toiled up the hill, the dogs running and smelling about as if for danger, before them. When they reached the top Durill turned round.

"I don't see anything of Julius, May; I dare-say he met Hardwick and went into the 'Stork' or home with him, to get a 'liquor-up,' as the turf men say."

"In all probability; meanwhile we had better get thawed before commencing the operations of the toilet. My fingers are all thumbs at present."

Just as the soup was being carried out, Julius appeared.

Blake bustled round. "Soup, sir, it is not cold?"

"No, thanks, Blake, I don't suppose it's turtle."

"No, sir," answered Blake, smiling.

"What kept you, Julius?" asked May, across the table.

"Nothing startling. I met Hardwick, and we turned into the 'Stork' for a warm. It has commenced to snow in good earnest, and promises to continue."

"Are the sheep all up, Durill, do you know?" asked the Squire.

"Yes, sir, they were brought in two days ago."

"Did you hear, sir, that Selby is selling his wines," asked Crispin, from the top of the table.

"Selby!" exclaimed the Squire, lifting his head. "No, why, what on earth ails the man to do that; his father left a splendid stock, which this young man cannot possibly have used."

"I don't know what he is doing it for; there is some talk about his going to China, but the wines are going for next to nothing, Whitfield told me, because the sale is so pushed."

"Indeed! I will certainly have some; his father kept a capital cellar. Remind me in the morning, Blake."

"Yes, sir."

Music and pleasant chatter wiled away the time, and twenty-five minutes to twelve found May sitting brushing out her long silken hair before the glass, and old nurse Joyce near the fire talking to her. May was a great favourite of hers, and nothing delighted the old woman more than to be admitted into May's room and perform any little service for her, such as brushing her hair, putting away her dresses, &c. But it was rarely May would allow her to do anything but sit by the fire and talk.

"You know, nurse, you are getting past work, and I like to see you taking your ease best; you did enough for me in days gone by."

"Ah! bless you, my dear, but I like to do for you all, Miss May, old as I am. I hope, if the Lord sees fit, that I shall nurse children of both yours and Mr. Durill's. I only want to live and do that."

May blushed and laughed.

"Then you will have to live a long time yet, nurse; I don't think either of us contemplate matrimony, at least at present."

Time enough for you, Miss May, but Mr. Durill really ought to get married. I am sure many love him, bless his handsome face. The rest of them I don't expect to do great shakes, leastways Master Cris and Miss Lois. I thought at one time that Mr. Archer and Miss Lois would take up with each other. Blake he thought so too."

"Did you? They were very friendly to be

sure, but that sort of friendship frequently springs up in a country house, nurse, and Lois is very fond of variety and amusement."

"Too fond, too fond, Miss May," replied old nurse, poking the fire, "but Miss Lois liked that young gent. She— The Lord save us!" ejaculated nurse, letting the poker slip out of her shrivelled hand on to the hearth with a clatter.

May turned quickly, with the brush suspended in the air.

"What is to do, nurse? Good heavens, Lois, you here? Are you ill?"

"Mercy on us, Miss May, the poor lamb is frightened out of her wits nearly. Here, sit down, my dear, you'll be better directly."

With May's assistance she put Lois into a chair, and there she sat, looking, as nurse said, "frightened out of her wits." Her lovely hair was streaming over her night dress, and she had not even a pair of slippers on. Old nurse com-

menced to rub her feet and talk soothing nonsense to the white beauty, whose tongue seemed fast to the roof of her mouth. Very few girls look well in their night gowns, but Lois Drever did. The long pure white dress seemed to impart a subdued purity to her beauty that was almost unearthly. It gave her that softness and compose of manner which in the daytime was the only thing wanting to render her perfect; it seemed as though, when she dropped the latest fashion from Madame Bento's, the soul, no longer oppressed by the vanities of the world, rose to the surface. Nurse began to question her, while May stood and looked on in astonishment. Lois had entered by the door, therefore she could not have heard old nurse's running comments on herself and Ted Archer, and, besides, Lois had got over that, as Judy had predicted, some time since.

"Now, my pet, tell old nurse what is to do."

Lois' lips parted, and the words dropped out in a low, terror-stricken way that appears to belong to all frights.

"I have seen it!" and her hands met in a nervous clasp on the "it."

Something not unlike a groan emanated from old nurse, and May exclaimed sharply—

"For goodness sake, Lois, speak out, and don't sit there as if you were stuffed; what is it you have seen?"

"King Hop," answered Lois, and straightway her teeth set to clapping in right good earnest.

"Nonsense, Lois," retorted May; "you are nervous and fancied it, you had better take some sal volatile. Nurse, will you get some?"

But nurse answered never a word. Her tongue seemed to have taken example of Lois's, and ascended to the roof of her mouth. She had slipped off her knees, in which position she had been engaged chafing Lois' cold feet, and was

now sitting on the floor in a state of complete stupefaction, and staring up at Lois. May stood looking first at one and then the other, quite calm, with the brush in her hand. Something seemed to be working in her mind, for she walked to the toilet table, and put the brush down, and there she stayed for a few seconds regarding Lois and old nurse steadily through the glass. At last she turned round, and, coming quite close to Lois, asked firmly—

"Lois, are you going to make a fool of yourself? Do you intend to sit there with your mouth shut all night?"

"Oh, May! I am so frightened, and you are extremely unkind to me!"

"No, I am not, indeed, Lois; only I want you to speak, or go back to your own room. It is so late, and I am tired."

"I dare not go back, May; I dare not, indeed!" exclaimed Lois, now thoroughly aroused by the

prospect of a re-encounter with the "thing" that had scared her. "Let me sleep with you—*do*, May, do!"

"Yes, Miss May, do!" chimed in nurse, "the poor thing is right down shook, I am sure of it!"

Nurse struggled up, and held on by the table while making this appeal.

May smiled.

"But what has frightened you, Lois? I don't approve of a scared bedfellow, and I really don't see why you should not go back to your own room. I will call up Parker, and tell her to sleep with you, or perhaps nurse will—eh, nurse?"

"If you wish me, Miss May, I will; but I am afraid I should be very little better than Miss Lois," answered the old woman, with a suppressed shudder.

A very amused expression crossed May's pale face, but it almost immediately gave place to a

serious one, and she turned to Nurse Joyce, and administered a rebuke.

"I am astonished to find you a victim to ignorant superstition, nurse; I gave you credit for better sense. You have lived too long in the world not to have proved the worthlessness of ghosts, warnings, mysterious sounds, &c. With Lois, it is quite another thing; one does not expect much from her, though I must confess you are lowered in my estimation, Lois, by this night's foolery. I wonder what papa or Durill would say if they saw you sitting there the picture of fright at something you either cannot or will not describe? You are fifty times worse than a child of five. Now, for the last time, will you be reasonable and speak out, or go back to bed? But I strongly advise you to make no noise about it, or you will have some of them out on you, and you will never hear the last of it."

No sooner had May ceased speaking than Lois burst into a violent fit of hysterical weeping.

May ejaculated "Good gracious!" and turned to warm herself at the fire, until such time as the storm should have passed, while something exceedingly like a sneer hovered round her mouth.

Lois sobbed away bravely, and when next she spoke it was by her own invitation. She plainly perceived that May would inquire no more if she sat there till morning.

"May, I saw it," began Lois.

"Saw what?" asked May, whisking round.

"The—the—the—King Hop—you know what I mean, May!"

"Yes, I know; go on. Where did you see it?"

"In my room. I was just getting into bed when I saw it at the end of the bed, on one of the knobs. I did, indeed, May!"

"Well, I did not contradict you, Lois. Pray go on. What took place next? Did the thing say anything to you? I hope it was nothing disagreeable."

"Oh, May, don't make fun!" said Lois, pitifully, "it frightened me dreadfully."

"I don't think there's much doubt about that, but you are a most unsatisfactory and provoking story-teller. Why can't you go on with the tale properly, and not keep me standing here? How did it end? go on."

"Why it looked at me and then disappeared up the chimney, I think; but I came away, I was so terrified. And, May, I dare not sleep alone!"

"I don't intend you to, but you must go back to your own room, and the next time it visits you be polite enough to open a window, and let it out, and don't come flying to me with such rubbishing tales. Nurse, will you give me that

flannel gown—that red one, it is thicker than this—and I will go and awake Parker?"

May put the gown on, and left the room, and proceeded to the night-nursery, and aroused Parker.

"Parker, I want you to go to Miss Lois; she is rather nervous to-night, not well perhaps. The children won't miss you, dear little trots."

"Yes, Miss May; I'll be there directly," responded the sleepy girl.

"Lois, you had better go; Parker is there," announced May on her return. "If you like, I will see you to the door."

Lois either could not make any objection, or did not like to, so she got up, looking awfully pretty in the trailing white garment, and followed May down the corridor.

"There now, good night, Lois, and go to sleep," recommended strong-minded May, with her hand on the door.

"Good night, and thank you, May," replied Lois, respectfully.

There is nothing so taming as fright, and it will make people do nearly anything.

Lois sported the white feather that night, just a wee bit, to May's disgust. She pulled the door softly to, and left Lois and Parker to their fate without a pang, and poor timid Lois thought her the very hardest-hearted monster in creation. But there are some things that other people, differently constituted, cannot by any possibility comprehend, though they may be all and everything that is awful to those to whom they are peculiar. So it was with May and Lois. Though sisters, they were very far removed in thoughts and mind; Lois was a long way behind May, whose active, well-balanced brain carried her off long past the reach of ghosts, or any other undesirable and unwholesome fancy. So there was every excuse for her apparent hard-heartedness;

she simply did not understand Lois. A ghost was a thing that had no place in her well-regulated mind. There was no room for it, and if it had crept in it would have been pounced upon by numerous matter-of-fact ideas and plenty of common sense, and soon sent "right about face." "My mind to me a kingdom is," and that was the case with May Drever; she was never low-spirited or lonely. She was grave enough at times, but then something was being planned and worked out before being put into execution. That was May's plan; go over everything in her own head before setting it before the eyes of other people. That was how she escaped figuring before the world in foolish escapades. She submitted everything to a minute inspection in her own mind, and when it proved satisfactory to her common sense it might safely appear in public. Her mind was like a well-planted garden—it was "evergreen;" ever a cool

retreat, to which she could retire, and shut herself in. Her store was large enough to stand any siege. There she was as secure as any lord in his castle.

Well might the rest of her family come humbly and ask her advice. God had given unto the last and plainest of that family a great gift—a wondrous treasure—a world within herself. He did it because He saw how it would be with her; she had no beauty, and many trials, so He gave her something that no one could ever take from her while she lived.

When May returned to her room she found nurse sitting muttering away to herself mysteriously.

"Nurse, what is to do with you? Are you never going to bed?"

"Yes, Miss May, directly; but I was just saying a little prayer for you all, my dear young lady. Miss Lois has upset me."

"What with? Her absurd fright?"

"Nay, Miss May, don't you laugh. I only hope it will not make you cry!"

"I don't feel afraid about it, nurse; but I had almost forgotten about that old superstition. It has slept all my life, and was only raked up for my amusement once by Durill. We had a good laugh over it, too, I remember."

"Miss May," began Nurse Joyce, gravely, "don't you make game of it, it won't bear it, my dear. I am an old woman and have lived here from a baby. I saw the Squire when he came into the world, and I have never been away from here two days together these eighty years. My father and mother served your grandfather and grandmother, and I know the family well. And I never knew King Hop come without a cause, Miss May."

"But, nurse, it seems ridiculous; what can bring him this time?"

"The Lord only knows, I don't; but watch, Miss May, there's trouble and death coming to the Drevers. God grant it may not be very soon!"

The tears were rolling down the poor attached old creature's cheeks as she bent nearly double by the table. Her face was withered and her eyes sunk but not dim, and she showed that in youth she had been pretty. May went up to her and took the wrinkled hand in hers.

"Nurse, you are carried away by your affection for us all; you think of us all as you did years ago when we were troublesome small children. We cannot expect to go through life without some trouble, and we must all die sooner or later, and it makes no difference whether King Hop comes or not. God will take us all the same."

"Yes, yes, Miss May, dear, that is true to be sure; but I do wish it had not come just now."

"Ah! nurse, we must look for changes; things have changed, I have changed, and the world has changed to me since the time I knelt at your knee and said my prayers. All but God has changed. Nurse, the same God that kept us then is keeping us now, looking at us this instant, and be sure He will do the best for us. Who is King Hop that we should fear him, when our Father says to us 'Fear not, for I am with you?' Now, good night, nurse dear, and go at once to bed."

She tenderly kissed the old woman, and closing the door sat down by the fire.

During those sweet times for thought May got very near to her Father, held communion with Him, and thought till He was present with her in the room. Some people don't believe in the invisible presence of God—a presence that can be felt yet not seen, except to the mind's eye. He does not come to everyone in that way, but it is not His fault, it is theirs. They do not seek

Him ardently and sincerely. That companionship can only come by deep thought and earnest solicitation, and a perfect diversion from the world for the time being. Then you may get very close to your Heavenly Father, and feel distinctly the soothing holy presence. It blows gently upon you, like a delicious breath of wind, it spreads its white wings over you like a dove, and then whisper your troubles and cares and ask for help, for the Lord is very near.

While May is thus sitting a bright flame leaps out of the coal; it is the fairy Recollection, showing her lamp, and she will tell you the story of King Hop. See, she waves her lamp as a signal for attention. Hush! she is beginning

THE STORY OF KING HOP.

King Hop is a bird, the king of the raven tribe, which has dwelt for ages in the turrets of Wild Wood. They never go away, winter or

summer, but generation succeeds generation in quiet succession. They are regarded as the weather glass to foretel the fortunes of the Drever family.

To one of the first Drevers a raven appeared ono night as he was sitting over his wine, and hopping along the table perched on a goblet. It told him he would go to his fathers that day fortnight. That day fortnight he died, having told the story in jest to his household. Since that time a raven has always appeared to them before any calamity. King Hop is supposed to be the oldest raven living, the King of each generation, and holds the coming events in his hands. Nothing has been seen of him for many years, but the tradition still lives in the memories of many. They are never killed or disturbed, there are strict orders issued against that. Ah! King Hop, thou comest not for good but evil; thou art a bird of ill omen.

Fairy Recollection dropped her lamp, and dived into the red coal.

The little bright lamp tumbling on to the hearth startled May out of her reverie, and she glanced at the clock on the mantel-piece. It wanted ten minutes to one. May passed her hand over her brow. Trouble was coming, foretold by grim King Hop, in what shape remained to be seen. May had dismissed the old tale from her mind years ago, but since Lois had really pushed it before her mind, several other old proofs of the solemn warnings of King Hop danced through her brain, and she sighed deeply. Her eyes fixed themselves on the fire, and a sad expression arose to her calm face, and something like two big tears glistened in her eyes, but they did not fall. May Drever never cried, her troubles were always endured silently, in a Spartan fashion. The clock in the court-yard called one, so May got up and smiled at her face in the glass—it looked

rather worn and awfully pale. "Late hours don't improve one's complexion," muttered she, "I had better make haste into bed." A few moments after the white eyelids dropped over the soft eyes, and the mouth smiled gently. Sleep had come, and with it rest.

The firelight slowly waned, and the grate cracked. Sleep will come to us all some day, but it will be a different sleep to May Drever's; it will be a sound sleep, and there will be no morning to dawn—it will last for ever. The waking will be in the other world, and there there is no night, no darkness. Supposing the call comes some night before we are ready? Oh! watch and make ready, for that call will surely come.

"Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth!"

CHAPTER V.

Terogardo Villas, Red Hill, looked anything but cheerful two days before Christmas. It wanted five minutes to the hour of eleven, and the breakfast things still occupied their place on the table. The cloth was soiled, and crumpled quite out of shape, while the dust was thick on every article in the room. The grate had quite parted company with its necessary and usual companion, black lead, and looked in consequence a dirty brown. Lolling in an easy chair at one side of the fireplace, was a female attired in a dirty silk dress, and a quantity of dirty cheap jewellery.

She was buried heart and soul in the contents of a grimy novel, whose interior was as soiled and impure as the exterior. She was following with bated breath the trials and vicissitudes of a certain handsome, dissolute vagabond, who prowled about in the dead of night, wrapped in a Spanish cloak, and squeezed himself up under archways, while some doleful bell tolled midnight. Then he would make a pounce on another figure coming along, there would be a clash of swords, and the unsuspecting stranger would at once stretch himself elegantly on his back, while the bewitching scoundrel wiped his sword on the inside of his cloak and walked off. He was extremely unhappy, ate nothing, rarely slept, and his eyes were continually flashing fire. This uncomfortable state of things was the result of an ardent and unwholesome affection for another man's wife. It was no sin, of course not, Manuel Rosealba was to be pitied ; the other

man's wife ought, out of gratitude for his loving her, to have lowered herself out of some convenient window, and run off with him. In the midst of such a story was Emily Drever, when we discovered her sitting before the fire at nearly eleven.

Can you wonder at the dirty and slovenly room when she was away following the dark-eyed fiend dressed up like an angel? A man who never by any chance went to church, and yet was painted in glowing colours. The astonishing part of it all is conscience never visits any of the people in those stories; they seem to live without it, and frequently come to an untimely end by falling over a cliff, and when found are locked in each other's arms, and looking extremely beautiful. While Emily Drever was drinking in every word that fell from the profane lips of the fascinating and tortured Manuel Rosealba, Gilbert, her husband, was

standing at the window looking the picture of misery and neglect. Pins had taken the place of buttons on his shirt, while the extremity of each cuff was ornamented by a fringe of rags. His wife would not condescend to repair them; she had been brought up with other ideas than plain sewing or pudding making. According to her own estimation of her charms, she ought to have married a baronet, only, unfortunately for her, the right sort of baronet generally prefers a lady for his wife, and not a great bouncing, ignorant dolly, who writes like a dressmaker, without being able to sew, and tosses her hat and jacket into a corner of the room when she comes in from a walk, instead of going up stairs. Gilbert glanced at his wife, and then at the things on the table.

"Emily, had these things better not be removed?"

"What?" asked that sweet creature, with her

mouth sticking out like a black woman's. (They were very fond of boasting of their French blood, but there was a difference of opinion about that, and, in all probability, had anyone taken the trouble to look back in the Ryde family it would have been found black). "Take the things away? Yes, I suppose so. If you want them to go you had better ring."

"What time will dinner be ready to-day, Emily?"

"I don't know."

The bell was answered, after a lengthened period, by a trolloping servant, with her hair in a net, and a brass brooch stuck in her collarless dress, who took the things away in a condescending sort of style, and who answered impertinently when spoken to. She could afford to be that; she knew she was safe, her mistress could not find fault with her, much less teach her, because she knew no better herself, set no example, and

was actually at the mercy of her servants. Gilbert spoke mildly, and endured much, because he was afraid of his wife. He had married her, and used her money, and only discovered when it was too late that she had a "devil of a temper." He had one too, but his only flashed out now and then, and sank to nothing before hers. His spirit was broken, he was a miserable young fellow, he had now no money, his family never troubled about him, and his wife taunted him with it and his poverty. They had battles often enough, out of which she came always victorious, invariably putting the stopper on by—"If you say another word I'll throw this cup at you." So Gilbert would collapse, and, after a bit, prudently make friends with her. Presently Gilbert ventured to speak again.

"Emily, I am going out for a little while, but I shall be home in time for dinner."

"All right," replied his better-half, "don't

hurry yourself; I don't know what time the girl will have dinner ready."

Gilbert heaved a great sigh, and left the room. He often congratulated himself upon having got the children safely away; he could not forget his own home, and how different his bringing up had been to the one his children were likely to receive at the hands of their mother. He wondered many and many a time whatever had induced him to marry Emily Ryde, and he generally arrived at one conclusion—that it was her paltry money that had tempted him, being in a fix at the time. He had sold himself, poor silly Gilbert, and he would live to repent it bitterly. Example goes a great way with everyone, unless they possess a wonderfully strong and determined character, which was the precise thing Gilbert Drever did not. He was deficient in learning and common sense, with no strength of mind, and at times a temper suited to a mule. Instead

of marrying a clever, clear headed, modest girl, who could have gently and by her example turned him in the right direction, he had married a big, vulgar girl—vulgar in mind, which is a thousand times worse than body—a girl who absolutely knew nothing, and thought too much of herself to learn. Her ignorance led her to believe that she would cease to be a lady (or what she considered a lady) if she wore a print dress in the morning and saw after her household and children. Her idea of a lady was plenty of money, dresses, servants, and nothing to do but to read trashy novels.

What a delightful existence; how improving to the mind; how like what God intended a woman to do!

She sat on reading, letting the hearth get covered with ashes, and the fire low.

At half-past one Gilbert came home ready for his dinner. Alas! alas! when it did come it

was dinner. Mutton chops, swimming in fat, a thing Gilbert could never manage. He looked aghast for a second, and then at his wife, who had been called to the table by the craving of hunger. She never did anything, or troubled about anything, unless she wanted it herself. On this occasion she sat back in the dirty chair yawning.

Gilbert silently assisted her to one of the disgusting chops, and said not a word; it was as well not, for in all probability she would have told him it was her brother's money that had paid for the chops, such as they were. Gilbert took a potato, which was yellow, and commenced.

Presently Emily looked up.

"Don't you want any dinner? had it out, I suppose?"

"No, I have not, but these chops are all fat, and you know I cannot eat fat, Emily."

"Oh, bother! Well, it is the girl's fault, she might have got leaner ones, I should think."

"Is there no pudding, Emily?"

"No, I did not want one to day."

She was again deep in her book, and would remain so till tea came in, after which she would invite Gilbert to conduct her to the play.

"I wonder whether that poor, stuck-up family of yours intends to send you anything this Christmas? If I had only known how I was to be treated, I would never have married you. You were all show, and my belief is you are all poor."

Gilbert said nothing, it was not much use, so she went on discharging her wrath at him.

"And your sisters, that you used to tell me such a deal about—a fine set they are, plain, proud things—I am certain from the one who came here for the kids. Her things were awfully plain, I would not have taken such clothes out of the shop; the whole lot would not cost five pounds, I know."

Still Gilbert was silent, though a red spot became visible on each cheek. He did not relish hearing his sisters called into question ; he carried a vivid recollection of them, and he too frequently contrasted their quiet, well-bred manner, with that of his bouncing wife. But she had not wasted her time, she had stuck pins into his heart on several occasions ; she had made him believe himself slighted; that his sisters were too proud to notice him, now he was down in the world. And why was he down? The question popped up to Gilbert many and many a time, and he pushed it aside without an answer. He was down because of extravagance and indolence, he knew that well enough, and he knew that his family were never too proud to notice anyone because of their poverty. But his poverty was wilfully produced, and they did not and could not hold with his doings or his wife's.

His marriage had been his ruin. Judy was

quite correct, there was no use hoping better things of Gilbert, hope had died for him.

He was being washed out of honesty, integrity, diligence, and gentility; he was floating out to sea, the great sea on which all vagabonds, wastrells, thriftless men, set sail, and where they ride on the billows of luck, sometimes getting on the rocks, and always living on their wits and chance scraps which blow their way, like bones to a poor lost cur. Nearly every family has one member of it drifting about rudderless on the waves of the world. I shall not say it was intended, because I don't believe any such rubbish. God made every man and woman to work, to work at something earnestly and faithfully, and He is keeping an account of how each performs his or her work. He made the world for His people, like the bees, to be busy, seeing that, without employment, life is a dreary waste. But He made no provision for idlers, except one—

that they were to be starved. "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

That passage—"He that humbleth himself shall be exalted, but he that exalteth himself shall be made low," is often quoted as a rebuke to pride. Those who do it make a great mistake.

"Ambition is the stamp of a superior mind," and the pride that accompanies it is not empty pride. Proper pride is a safeguard; the desire to know more and be above other people prevents one dipping into mischief, or stooping to slippery tricks, and when every moment is occupied there is not much time to plot wickedness.

The morning after Lois's fright Judy came to May, and asked her whether she had been ill the previous night.

"Ill?" asked May, looking astonished. "No. Why do you inquire?"

"Because I fancied I heard your voice and

someone else's late talking, and I concluded it was either yourself or one of the children."

"No, we were not ill; but don't mention it, Judy."

"Why not?"

"Nothing particular, only it was some nonsense of Lois's. She is so stupid at times, I feel as if I could shake her well."

Judy smiled.

"You are severe, May; poor Lois is like mamma, and you are not, that is all."

"And a great blessing, too; imagine us all being so absurd."

"Well, but you have not related her absurdity yet?"

"And I don't intend to either, so all you have to do is say no more about it."

"Highty-tity, May, we are up; come, don't be cross, dear old woman, you have two deep, deep lines on your brow. I shall not attempt to

soothe you, that task belongs to Durill, so I shall send him."

"You will do nothing of the sort, Judy. I want to get this copying done—it seems everlasting; but the truth is, I am always being interrupted."

"Ah, that is a polite hint for me to depart. Well, I take it—so adieu."

Judy bowed herself out of the room. She knew May was bothered by her face, and she wisely forbore to tease her more. She understood how it was, and she loved May. In the hall she met Durill and Ivo.

"Where's May, Judy?"

"In your room busy; you had better go."

"What for—anything the matter?"

"Go and see," replied Judy, walking past.

Two strides and Durill was in the room; his eyes opened to their widest.

"My pet, what is to do?"

"To do? nothing Durill."

"Yes, there is, May; you look tired."

"Silly fellow, I cannot afford to be tired before twelve o'clock. See, I have nearly finished?"

Durill's answer was to clap the book to.

"I think I am to blame; you do too much for me."

"Ah, Durill, how can you? I should be so miserable without your work; who sent you here now?"

"Judy; but she did not send me, only I asked for you, and she told me she thought I had better come to you."

"What rubbish! just like old Judy. And where were you two bound for?"

"Ivo and I have been making a tour round the place, and I came in to get a gun, that is all."

Ivo had been looking over the top of the table with his intelligent eyes, and now he spoke in a winning soft voice. There was a streak of winter

sunlight slanting across the room, and it caught Ivo's beautiful hair, and flickered amongst the rich golden waves. He seemed strangely beautiful standing thus, with his seal-skin cap fitting closely round the sunny head, and the dark fur kissing the high white forehead.

"Aunty May, can I have this?" holding up a thick stick of red wax.

"Yes, Ivo, you may, but you must mind, and not play with the fire now you have it."

"I'll take care, Aunt May."

May did not again name the subject. Ivo was the very soul of honour; he would not have broken his baby word for anything. He was a noble young knight, ready to grasp anything with his tiny hands to protect anyone he loved. He was a perfect little lion, and had a way of shaking his curls back like a war horse. He was extremely sensitive, and his nostrils and mouth would quiver with pride or excitement. He

rarely, if ever, cried. May used often to speculate on his future life, and named her fears to big Durill one day.

"You know, Durill, a blight to Ivo would be dreadful; he is so sincere himself, it would break his heart to be deceived."

"Oh, he must take his chance, May, like every other boy; but the love won't come yet awhile."

"I am not so sure of that. Those finely constituted minds are always more susceptible, and Ivo is nearly certain to give his affection young. I hope and trust he may love wisely when the time comes, dear little fellow; he puts me in mind of a young warrior, and it would be so dreadful if he were cheated; it would break his trusting heart."

"But he would get over it—it does not kill—and love again."

"Yes, I suppose; but it would be a bitter

struggle, and I question whether it would be worth much after."

"Poor Ivo! he is a little gentleman, and I have noticed one thing. If he finds anyone out in an untruth, however slight, he never believes them again, whatever they say."

"Then that is the very thing; he is but a baby now, think what he will be when older."

Durill took a long pull at his pipe; he was thinking of the time when he was, to use his own expression, a "small shaver," and a smile crossed his handsome face.

"What is tickling your fancy, Durill?"

The smile increased to a broad grin, and he at last laughed outright.

"Why, I was just laughing at my youthful days. I had a profound contempt for all the little ladies of my acquaintance; and as for loving them, I believe I should have roared had I been

compelled to play with them longer than I chose. I am afraid I have no love in me."

"I like that amazingly. You talking about love! Why, were I other than your sister, I should consider myself blessed above everyone if you offered me ever so small a portion. There is a world of love in your big heart, Durill! I wish you would give it to someone."

"I'll give it to you, May."

"Thank you; but I could not keep it against that mysterious small person you told me of."

This morning in the snuggery Ivo seemed more in danger of a check than ever, and she gazed at him fearfully. There is always some great danger where there is great beauty.

Durill was skilled in reading May's countenance, and he saw something was to do.

"Ivo, little man, you go and amuse yourself

till I call you. I shall be sure to, but I want to speak to Aunt May."

"Yes, Uncle Durill."

He came round, and put up his little face to be kissed. May gave him a great hug.

CHAPTER VI.

"Now, May, darling, what is it?" asked Durill, drawing her to him. "Something is wrong I see plainly, and you must tell me."

"It is nothing, Durill, dear, it is not, indeed; I am quite able to manage it myself, only Judy came in, and teased me about it."

"What is 'it?'"

He held her quite closely, and May knew he wanted to know, and would do his best to.

"*It* is something you have heard about, and of which we have frequently spoken—something that both of us ridiculed."

"We do that so often, May, that I cannot

possibly guess. We are rather sarcastic and severe, and spare nothing, so you must tell me."

"Well, it is that old business again—King Hop!"

"King Hop! You surely don't mean to say *that* is revived!"

"Yes, I do, and by Lois too. I had quite a scene last night with her and nurse, and this morning Lois is positively ill. I am afraid of the cause of her indisposition coming out. I made her promise not to tell, but there is no dependence to be placed on her."

"Was she really frightened?"

"Yes, indeed; I never saw anyone so completely beside themselves. She could not say a word for several minutes, and then what she did tell I wrung from her—she was terrified."

"How did it happen? When did she see the thing?"

"Why, just as she was in bed, I understood the bird came and settled on the foot-board. That was what she told me last night, but upon seeing her this morning she confessed to something more."

"And that something more? What did the bird say to her? for tradition says 'King Hop speaks!'"

May did not seem inclined to relate what his majesty had been amiable enough to say.

"Oh, Durill! it is useless speaking such nonsense; I am only afraid of it getting to papa's ears. I had rather anyone had heard it than Lois."

"So would I; but you have not told me what it said."

"Well, Lois says, but then we must allow for her terror, which seemed to have deprived her of her few wits, that it settled on one of the knobs and flapped its wings, and croaked out

'Going, Going, Going; the Squire, the Squire, the Squire,' and then disappeared."

"And where did it go to?"

"Lois did not wait to see; in all probability up the chimney, it is their usual way. She sprung out of bed and rushed to my room, looking like a ghost herself."

Durill stroked his beard, and gazed at May thoughtfully.

"It is a bad business, May; if it gets wind there is no telling where or how it will end. The governor would be in an awful wax if the story got to his ears, because people would immediately say it was a sign of his ——"

Then Durill came to a dead stop, and May, turning her calm face to him, supplied the word "death."

"You need not play hide and seek with me, Durill."

"I never do, my brave darling; only it is an ugly word, May."

"Yes, it is, and I don't know why we use it, I am sure, so I will alter it—'A sign that papa is going home.' I like it better so, Durill, it robs it of half its bitterness putting it that way. What cowards we are to be sure, how we shrink at the mention of that call, and I believe because we don't think about it half often enough."

"May, do you consider it right to watch for it?"

"No, not to watch, in the sense you mean, but I consider it right to be prepared, and to have got so accustomed by watching and waiting, with God, that when it does come it will not be a shock to us. I don't think it need be, if you call a little common sense to bear upon it. It is what every one is brought up to expect; it is regarded and spoken of as the ultimate end of all things. The mistake is this, it is not properly

understood. It is looked upon as awful. Death! It means, to most people, to suffer unutterable anguish, and then to be, perhaps, tormented for ever; at any rate, heaven, which is their brightest hope, is an existence which they cannot conceive in any possible way, and beautiful though they are told it is, they would rather not taste of its brightness and beauty, if they might have their own way. It is like a child at a party saying 'No, thank you,' to some unusual dainty. Their reason for saying 'No, thank you,' is, they don't know what it is like. Many people's ideas of heaven are distorted, hence their perplexity. God only asks for simple, trusting belief in Himself, and that is the one thing necessary to get to heaven. Surely it is little enough to ask, and very little to give; all that is needful is belief. 'Believe, and ye shall be saved.' Don't you think we can do that, and let our father go without repining when he is called? Durill, it

is very little to do for our Lord; I believe we ought to do it cheerfully, trusting in Him who, by His unselfish mercy, never deceived."

Durill's voice was husky as he replied—

"May, do you think it is so near? Do you think the end will be soon?"

"I don't know; I hope not, but whenever it is the wrench will be great. Papa is more to me than mamma, Durill."

May's face was quite still. Durill thought how like she was to her father. He knew that May, the child of the Squire's old age, was dearer to him than all the rest. May had never, in reality, been a child; it seemed as though she had come at the very last a small Squire; like him in face, ideas, and ways, to be a picture of the old Squire when he should be no more.

"Where is Lois, May? I shall go and see her, and impress silence upon her. I had rather it had happened to any one than her."

"So would I. I doubt her ability to keep her tongue quiet. She is, or rather was, in her dressing room."

"Well, I shall go to her; come with me, May."

He took her hand and led the way to the apartment of the much-admired Miss Lois. After a lusty knock from the strong hand of Durill, a faint voice invited them to enter, and upon doing so they found the graceful Lois arranged in the most becoming attitude in a nice easy chair before the fire. Her toilet was incomplete; she was indisposed, and on the strength of that wore a bewitching dressing-gown of blue Cashmere, which fitted her and yet did not fit her, an insinuating alluring sort of garment which vaguely hinted at charms. Her hair was loose and fell at its own sweet will in a golden cloud on the pale blue. Her feet were thrust into pretty blue slippers edged with fluffy white fur, and in her

hands reposed the latest novel from Mudie's. Lois was not a reader, at least not a reliable reader; she gave each book a glance, but not till she had heard someone else speak of it. Then she got it, and settled her eyes for about a quarter of an hour, and, generally, on the love passages then. Her reading was like herself—shallow; she skimmed along the surface of everything, and would in all probability skim along through life in the same manner. She stood a very good chance of doing it, being of that nature which sorrow only touches, never takes hold of. She was up to-day, down to-morrow, nothing was lasting with fairy Lois. And who could be so sullen and ungenerous, so wanton, as to stop in the bustle of life to crush her poor petty existence? it would be like stopping to kill a butterfly capering in a garden on a summer's day. She with her mellow brain and few wits would never make a figure in the world,—never

do anything extraordinary, either good or bad. She came into the world half washed out, and she would never interfere seriously with anyone in the walk of life. Her sole idea and aim was effect; she never did anything without an eye to it, and, consequently, giving it the benefit of her whole attention, she always succeeded.

Durill and May flashed a glance of amusement at each other, when the lovely creature treated them to a languid smile of welcome; it was almost too ridiculous when they recollected that her indisposition was caused by an awful and mysterious vision and warning. One does not expect to find the individual so favoured decked out and set off like Lois the morning after. But Julius was not overdrawing Lois's character when he gave it as his opinion that "Lois would not forget which was her prettiest night cap if the house was on fire, and with it coquettishly set on

her head, make a Gazelle sort of leap into the arms of the handsomest fireman."

"How kind of you to come and see me, Durill," said Lois, sweetly, to that gentleman, who was standing admiring her.

Brothers sometimes do admire their sisters, and in spite of all her faults and weak points, Lois Drever was a lovely picture to look upon, and Durill was but human. So he stood and gazed at her.

"Kind, is it? well, I don't know about that. To tell the truth, I have a word to say to you."

"Have you? Oh, dear, I hope it is nothing disagreeable; I don't feel equal to any starts this morning."

Durill smiled.

"I should think not; you got start enough last night, eh?"

"Don't Durill—pray, don't," exclaimed Lois,

raising her hands prettily. "May, will you hand me that smelling bottle?"

"Nonsense, Lois; there's nothing to make you faint. Durill looks particularly real."

"You are unfeeling, May; you cannot understand me."

"Oh yes I can, perfectly well; you are not a riddle, Lois, by a long way," and May smiled.

Durill grinned.

"Now, then, Lois, buckle to, for since I came here to speak to you about your fright, I am not going away without doing it. So if you have made your mind up to faint, make haste about it, for the sooner you go off the sooner you'll come to."

Lois seemed undecided what to do; May and Durill had evidently no intention of understanding her, so she determined to keep her senses and do a becoming pout.

"Lois, who have you seen this morning?" asked Durill, proceeding at once to business.

"No one but you two and Judy, who put her head in for half a minute before I was out of bed."

"And you did not tell her anything about last night, did you?"

"Now, Durill, you are at it again."

"Of course—I told you I should. Tut, child, put your hands down, there's no one to admire them, and listen to reason. I want you to tell me about last night's folly?"

"Folly!" uttered Lois, angrily, her eyes glittering. "Folly! you don't know what you are talking about, Durill; I only wish you had seen it instead of me. Talk about unbelief, indeed; you are unbelieving. I suppose you think I invented it? A likely tale, indeed, when I was nearly terrified out of my senses."

"I am not surprised at that Lois; it needs but little to frighten your senses away. According to your own account, one would think you had seen a skeleton grinning at you, and clapping its rattling hands, in place of a majestic bird, if you saw that?"

"Durill, I did see it."

"Then have the goodness to tell me all about it."

Lois commenced, and related the story in a pretty, affected, and at times, really terrified manner, and May and Durill sat calmly by, quite unmoved. You must remember they had settled it all before they came up, and if they had not they were not the sort of people to show what they felt.

"Well, Lois, you say you did see it, so I cannot contradict you, and when King Hop favours me with a call, I shall be in a position to compare notes with you; at present you have the

whip hand of me. But my object in visiting you this morning was to impress silence—I may almost say, to command it. You are not, under any circumstances, to repeat one word of it to anyone. If you are questioned, say you were ill last night, but not one word about 'King Hop,' recollect."

"Oh! dear; I have been lectured and warned by May already; you two seem determined to seal my lips."

"Yes, and for a wise purpose, Lois; it would be no end of a misery if it transpired; Durill is quite right."

"Of course, you are certain to agree with him?" Lois yawned.

"Tired of our company, eh Lois? so we will take ourselves off. Come, Lady May. Farewell Lois, keep your promise"

In the passage Durill turned to May.

"I don't fancy she is more tired of my com-

pany than I am of hers; she is all very well to look at, but to talk to—'let us draw a veil,' as your friend Mademoiselle Anna would say."

"You cheeky fellow; Lois is not one bit worse or more stupid than the generality of pretty girls."

"And you are different to the general run, is that it, May?"

"No, that is not it. I am plain-looking, and cross-tempered, that is the difference."

"And a most acceptable difference it is, too."

"You mean an unfortunate difference, Durill."

"How so?"

"Because it would not do to exist between man and wife."

"Then how are you going to fix it?"

"Remain single."

"May, May, is that so, child?"

"Yes, it is 'so,' Durill. Don't look grave about it."

"Is it such a great calamity, then?"

"Yes, in my opinion it is."

"But you'll change your mind, May."

"Shall I? very good. In the meantime, with your permission I'll change my course, and return to my work in the snuggery. You have to seek Ivo, Durill."

"Yes, I sha'n't forget, it would not do to disappoint the little chap."

He departed on that errand, and May continued her way to the cosy snuggery.

Christmas day dawned, and the ground was thickly covered with snow. There had been a festive family gathering at Wild Wood, only one absent, and that one almost the best beloved by Madam.

Many thoughts were given to Gilbert, but none dared to mention his name; it had the same effect as a chill wind.

Jokes were being cracked as they all sat merrily round the drawing-room fires. It wanted a quarter to twelve. Let us take a peep at that village; let me see if I can carry you there.

Within the houses and cottages all was cheerful and bright, without all was still and white. Angels are said to walk when the ground is carpeted with pure snow, so soft, so fluffy. I think they were abroad that night. I like to fancy them there, fluttering round and shedding blessings abundantly.

It was as light as day; the moon shining down beautifully and calmly made every house, window, and doorway stand clearly out. There was the Round-house, there the brewery gates to the right, to the left corner the "Stork," while High-street ran along in front. Opposite a pretty road where Doctor Tinley and Mark Calvert lived, further down than Billinghurst's. Not a soul stirred. Along the pretty road lies the old

ivy-covered church down a lane to the left; it stands alone with the lime trees swaying peacefully over the graves. In the summer time the sheep graze the long grass, but to-night it is still, and the little white gates shut. It stands alone in the pale moonlight, alone with its quiet dead. And yet not alone, for the angels, stepping lightly, leaving not so much as a footprint in the snow, pass over the graves, and whisper softly, "Peace, peace." Hush! hush! There's a sound; it comes from the old belfry. It swells nearer and nearer, and then it is heard faintly far away over the woods and hills.

Listen! it is midnight, the clocks told that a second ago, and now the bells ring out in rich deep tones the old, old message, striving to push their way into all hearts. They say—

"Peace and goodwill—Peace and goodwill—Peace and goodwill to all mankind!"

Aye! Peace to the living—peace to the sleep-

ing dead. It were better, perhaps, that some living were laid to rest in that old churchyard, hushed by the song of the bells; for it is long, long, if the time ever comes, before we can say—

> "But now it has fallen from me,
> It is buried in the sea,
> And only the sorrow of others
> Throws its shadow over me!"

The night wore on, that Christmas night years ago now, but no Christmas has ever been like that one to me, or ever will be again.

CHAPTER VII.

The sport was kept up at Wild Wood; it pleased Madam that it should be so, no doubt at the special request of Lois, who seemed to have almost if not quite recovered the Archer blight. And the servants declared it was one of the old Christmases back again. Not quite, however, for Gilbert was absent, though no one named it.

There were the clergyman's daughters, and the Misses Tinley, and several others, spending a musical evening at the Hall one night, and once, after playing, May escaped out of the room to seek Judy, who had very mysteriously disappeared, and someone had remarked it. But Judy

was not in her room, and May could not find her, so she returned, and stopped for a moment to warm herself at the fire in the hall. Blake came along presently.

"Do you happen to know where Miss Drever is, Blake?"

"No, Miss May, I cannot say I do; the last time I saw her she was going along here. And, bless me, if that side-door is not ajar! No wonder you feel chilly, Miss May. That James will never think on, I am sure. We shall be having the place robbed some night—that's what it will be."

Blake shut the door, and slipped the bolt.

"Are we going to have any supper to-night for these people, Blake?"

"Yes. Law, Miss May! it would not be like Wild Wood, to send the guests away without. It is ready in the dining-room, but it is not to be served till half-past ten, Mrs. Morrison says. I

am right down glad to have these parties going on, Miss May, and I hope it won't be long before we have a wedding breakfast on."

"A wedding breakfast! You are ambitious, Blake; but whose is it to be?"

"Why, yours, or Miss Lois's, to be sure. Miss Minnie is the only one married yet; I cannot think how it is, Miss May."

May laughed at the old man's evident discomfiture.

"Never mind, Blake, it's not your fault, that is certain; but I am sorry you want to get quit of me, Blake."

"Get quit of you! Why, bless you, my dear young lady—"

"If you please, Mrs. Morrison wants you, Mr. Blake," said James, at the back of them.

"Very good, James."

"Excuse me, Miss May."

And Blake departed, the pink of a respectful old servant.

May still remained by the fire, though alone. She did not care about the musical evenings, and she knew she would never be missed; there was Minnie, Lois, and the boys, to entertain the people, and at present the Miss Andertons were engaged wading through a long and tedious duet.

May's reverie was broken by a knock at the side-door by the snuggery, the door Blake had a few minutes before shut and bolted.

"I wonder who it is," said May to herself; "not any of the servants, they know the difference. Must be some stranger got confused in the dark, and thinks it is the servant's entrance."

She stepped over the wide hall, and softly opened the door. There, standing in the porch in her evening dress, was Judy.

"Good heavens! Judy, what are you doing out at this hour," exclaimed May, in a startled whisper as she stepped in, shivering.

"Nothing particular, May," answered Judy, turning her face away. "I went to see the moon rise."

"Don't trouble yourself to invent stories, Judy. I am not stupid; the moon rose an hour and a half ago, and you have not been out of the drawing-room more than a quarter of an hour. Do you know you are as white and cold as death? Come with me," and May passed her arm through hers and led her to the dining-room, where supper was ready laid. The room was empty of all but one footman. May poured out a glass of wine from the first decanter at hand, and held it to Judy's pale lips. William bustled out of the room—he was a shy young man.

"Judy, why did you not put something on?" asked May, who was attentively regarding her as she sipped her wine.

"I could not wait. I don't know, May dear; don't, please, ask me about it, it was so ridiculous

of me; but it looked so nice, I thought I should like a little walk," replied Judy, in a frightened beseeching manner quite unusual to her.

May set the glass down, and commenced chafing the cold hands. The wine had set the blood flowing again, and she only shivered slightly now.

"Nay, Judy," observed May, kindly (and there was a ring of pain in the tuneful voice), "I don't want to press the subject, only I advise you to be more careful in future. If I had not been in the hall you would have been admitted by one of the servants, and they would have remarked upon Miss Drever being out at ten o'clock, on a cold winter's night, in evening dress."

"Don't, May, don't; I could not help it. But how came the door to be fastened, I left it ajar, I am sure?"

"I know you did, but Blake saw it, and bolted it. He thought it was one of the footmen's care-

lessness—James I think he blamed. I hope he won't scold the lad."

"I hope not. See if you can't stop him, May, for I don't want to say it was I who left it open, and there is sure to be a fuss made."

"Very well, and you had better return to the drawing-room, Judy; you have been missed already."

"Who by?" asked Judy, sharply.

"Mark."

"How do you know, May?"

"Because he asked me to find you, that's how."

Scarcely had Judy left the room than voices became audible by the door near the housekeeper's room.

"I tell you I did not leave the side door by Mr. Durill's study open; I bolted it before coffee was served to the company. I remember it quite well, because Mr. Durill came along with little

Miss Evelyn while I was doing it, and he sent me for a rice cake for her."

"Well, James, I won't contradict you, but I am positive not one of the gentlemen has been out since eight, because I have been mostly passing about there all the evening, and they are all in the drawing room now, for another thing," retorted old Blake.

"Dear, dear, bless us all," said a woman's voice, "what a thing, the side-door open, and all this plate about. Have you counted it, Mr. Blake?"

"Yes, Mrs. Morrison, I have, and I sent William in too, and he says it's all right. But I never knew the like to happen before; I'll fasten the door myself another night, when there's a party on."

"Yes, that would be safest; that door being so much used by the gentlemen, it is always on the latch, and it is not safe. We never hear a

sound down this passage, and the family shut up in the drawing-room ; every spoon might be taken off the table, and no one the wiser, I am sure."

May listened to this discourse, and then walked out of the room quietly. She did not think it prudent to interfere, James had already received all the scolding he was likely to get; and it would only cause suspicion for her to attempt to explain it; so she resolved to let well alone.

But May was rather troubled, nevertheless. What could have induced staid Judy to perambulate in the cold? not the moon—that was quite settled; then, what had? Not one word did May mention about it to Judy, who seemed ill at ease and looked very pale. If anything dropped Judy started; and one day Julius let a volume fall out of his hands, which so frightened Judy that she uttered a faint scream.

"How nervous you are, Judy ; I had no idea of it. You should ask Mark to give you a tonic. Shall I? I am going to see him presently."

"Don't tease me, Julius, but you are so rough, letting a great book fall so suddenly, enough to startle anyone, I think."

"No, not anyone; there's May as tranquil as possible, and I recollect the day when it would not have affected you either. One would think you had something on your mind, Judy."

"He says quite truly, Judy," remarked May, when Julius had gone. "You are getting dreadfully nervous—are you ill?"

"Now, May, don't," and Judy put up her hands as though to keep something off, "I cannot stand against you."

"Dear old Judy, I would not distress you for worlds; but I see something is wrong. Can't you tell me what it is?"

"No, May, I cannot, so don't ask it," and Judy rose and left May, thereby putting a stop to further questioning.

About a week after the musical party the side door was again softly opened one clear frosty night by a female wrapped in a shawl. With noiseless steps she sped on, and turned to the left into the Druid's Grove; once in its thick shelter, she stopped a second to draw breath. An owl called shrilly, and she flew on again till she came to a great yew tree. It was the oldest tree known, and its trunk required quite a chain of arms to span round it. It was called the "Druids' Tree."

Close to one side of it stood a figure—a tall man's form, in a long top coat, and a muffler round his neck, which reached so high as to screen the lower part of his face entirely; a Scotch cap fitting tightly to his head completed the disguise, which was as perfect as it need have been, especially in a place like the Druids' Grove, where the trees were so thick, and the moon only shone through in patches.

Round this tree the monks of old were supposed to pray and confess their sins, and there was a feeling of awe about the place, as if it knew it was sacred, or once had been. But these two were not there for that purpose. As she stopped by the tree and glanced round, the man came out of the shade, and stood with the patch of moon light behind him; he was a tall fellow.

"What a time you have been coming, Judy?" said he.

"I did not know you were here, and I could not get away sooner. I shall be caught some night, surely, and it terrifies me nearly to death. Why can't you manage some other way?"

"I can't. Are you going to turn against me, Judy, and join with the rest in the hunt?"

"Oh! for mercy's sake, don't speak so loud," exclaimed Judy, in agony. "You know I will never do that, though I once thought I could. Do

you think I would sneak out this way to meet you here, if I did not—"

"Did not what, Judy," said he.

"Love you—that's what I intended to say, only it occurred to me which was the strongest feeling within my heart, love or fear."

"And which is it?"

"Fear, I really believe, else I should never have come here."

"Oh! Judy, has it come to that? So they have poisoned your mind against me, but you loved me once, Judy, I know you did."

"Yes, and on the strength of that you force me to run contrary to my conscience and principles. I am getting almost afraid to look my own brothers and sisters in the face, since I took to stealing out to see you."

"Brothers and sisters, indeed! much good they'd do you or anyone else."

"Hush! how dare you speak against them?

But, I see, you have become impudent because you see how weak I am, how timid I feel of the Lord only knows what, for I would not carry you past anything *now.*"

He laughed a low mellow laugh.

"Don't get waxy, my dear Judith; it won't mend matters. By-the-bye, I saw May a little while since at the library window. She gets better looking, I fancy."

"You need not exert yourself to fancy anything about May, she does not about you; you would stand a poor chance if left to her mercy. But, however did you see into the library?"

"Easily enough. I thought you were a long time coming, so I ventured across under cover of the darkness and trees and saw her. I suppose if I had been seen I should have been taken up, eh, Judy?"

"Possibly, for that garment does not improve your appearance, allow me to tell you. But I

am dreadfully cold, and I am certain to be found out. May did catch me the night of the party. I got locked out and she let me in."

"May did, did she? And what did she say? Read you a stunning lecture, of course?"

"No, I had rather she had; she looked more than she said; but she was kind and screened me."

"Screened you? From whom?"

"Never mind, I cannot be bothered telling you now. What is it you want this time?"

"You are not able to guess, I suppose? Well, then, I must tell you—money."

Judy stood with her back to the tree and him before her with his arms folded across his chest. Judy's eyes opened wider at this cool request.

"Money!" she repeated slowly, "which I cannot give you," and she raised her head defiantly.

"But I tell you I must have it, or I'll ——;

but I don't think I need repeat that; you'll get it for me, Judy?"

Poor Judy's face had blanched at the threat; perhaps he saw it.

"Are you dumb, Judy?"

It seemed rather like it, for she gave no answer. Presently she moved and drew her shawl round her shivering form.

"How do you suppose I am to get this money? I have got none by me, you have taken pretty good care of that; and I am not able to get any more at present, nor for a long time."

"Pish, don't try to hoodwink me. Come, Judy, get me the money, or I warn you I shall throw up the game. Ask Durill, he has got plenty and will lend, or give it you for that matter."

"Indeed! is that your idea? You are wrong for once. Durill is wide awake. He would suspect directly, because my own allowance is

quite enough for my wants, and always has been up to the ill-fated day you came here. I almost wish you were dead."

"Kind, upon my soul. But I don't feel much like kicking at present, though I am confoundedly dry. I say, Judy, could you get me something to drink?"

"Are you mad? How do you suppose I can get anything to drink?"

"Well, you had better give me money, and I can call at the nearest public on my way to the station. I am getting just like an owl, I can see better in the dark than the light."

He laughed again.

"Hush! for heaven's sake. What's that?" gasped Judy, pulling him out of the moonlight under the trees.

"What's what? I hear nothing; it's some bird. This place is infested with owls, bats, and ravens. Don't get scared, Judy."

"Silence. Will that tongue of yours never stop? I heard footsteps, I am sure; there they are again. Listen!"

Yes, Judy's ears were correct; there were steps on the hard drive crossing towards the house, and presently a figure appeared at the end of the Druids' Grove and stood still. Judy drew her companion out of sight, but seemed to forget herself. The moon was bright enough out of the thick grove, and she had no difficulty in recognising the man standing there as Crispin. What if he should take it into his head to come down the Grove? After a second he moved on to the court yard, and Judy breathed again.

"Thank goodness that danger's past, at least for this time. But I must go, now."

"Stop a moment. What about the money?"

"I will try. I suppose I must."

"So do I; but I think you might give me something now to be going on with."

"No, no, I cannot, so don't hold me, I will go."

She wrenched her shawl out of his grasp, and hurried off. He waited an instant, and muttering something, strode down the grove.

There was a gate at the outskirt of the wood, in the hollow that led to the station, and for that gate he was evidently making. He would be as good as his word, no doubt, and sit drinking and smoking in the little public till the train came up.

Judy flew on, looking right and left, but she gained the house safely, and threw off the shawl, which she put into a closet behind the side door, where fishing tackle was kept. Barely had she done so when May came down the hall, arm-in-arm with Durill, laughing very much.

"Why, here's Judy—"

May stopped short, Judy looked very much like that other night when May let her in.

"So it is," said Durill, "how cold you look

Judy. I hope that William has not let my study fire out, else he will get his ears pulled."

"No, it is not out," replied Judy.

A happy thing she could say so, but chance had favoured her, she had seen through the partly open door the blaze dancing on the wall.

"Come with us, Judy, there's a regular lark on to-night. Julius is playing a match at billiards with Lois, and it is capital fun, he makes such game of her."

"Where's Crispin?"

"Cris? I don't know; away on his own business, I suppose. In the village, most likely."

"Or doing spoons with Edith Anderton. I fancy Crispin is rather gone in that quarter," chimed in May.

"You don't say so? Let me see, Edith is the fair one, is she not? The one that wore the bunch of blue things in her hair the other night?"

"Yes, that is Edith. Which do you like best, Durill, of the four?"

"I really can't say, there's so little to choose between them; they're all fat, fair, but not forty yet. I think Alice is a nice girl, though."

"Yes, I think so, too, but Crispin does not seem to fancy any but Edith. I wonder if it will end in anything?"

"Can't say, I am sure, May; but there will be no objections made by Madam, for the girl is of good family, and a clergyman's daughter, so master Cris is in the right road."

"Well, if I am to see this match, Durill, you had better take me, else it will be over. Are you coming, Judy?"

"Yes, dear, lead on."

A peal of laughter greeted them at the door of the billiard-room, and when they entered Julius was holding on to the table in fits at Lois, who,

mounted on a buffet, was striking right and left, in a perfect frenzy, and saying—

"There, now, Julius, you are a nasty thing, you spoil my play just to aggravate me, I know you do."

"I am afraid you will never play billiards, Lois, my dear," coolly remarked Julius; "you are too excitable, you should be collected, or your hand will never be steady."

"How are you getting on, Lois?" asked Durill, going to her side.

"Not at all, Durill; and I shall lose my gloves. Oh, dear!"

Lois was frightfully excited; her cheeks burned, and her lips were parted eagerly. She certainly would lose the game at billiards, but she would win a game at hearts. Any man would have been struck with her beauty, childish impulse, and pretty petulance. She just looked a lovely doll, in her white dress and pink ribbons. Durill

said Lois was refreshing to the eye, if nothing else. They were all standing round the table, not so much watching the game as listening to Julius, and his witty sayings—May and Durill at one side, Judy at the other. It was an immensely long table, and big Durill was leaning comfortably on one elbow.

"Billiards, eh?" exclaimed a voice, and glancing up they saw Crispin standing near the door. Lois turned.

"Here, Cris, you duck, come and assist me; my hand is tired, and yours is sure to be steady?"

"I am not so sure of that, Lois. Crispin is in love, and if he is like I was during that awful period, he won't be able to write his own name respectably. Shall I ever forget the torment I endured?"

Crispin smiled.

"What a fellow you are, Julius. I suppose

that was when you had the Kate Calvert fever," laughed Judy.

"Don't, Judy, don't; spare my feelings. But Crispin is in love, I'll bet anyone a new hat."

Crispin said—"Rubbish, Julius; but someone is in love, though, I can tell you."

"Ah! what's that? Silence! order—order!" cried Julius, flourishing his billiard cue. "A statement is about to be made by Crispin Benton Drever, Esq., the nature of the discourse being love! Attention, ladies and gentlemen, if you please."

There was attention, of course, and Durill whispered—

"I wonder what's coming now?"

"Proceed, witness,—proceed! His lordship's waiting!" continued Julius.

"Well, there's someone in this house in love!"

"That's not much," cried Lois; "I daresay all are for that matter."

Her cheeks were dyed a deeper pink.

"You are, of course, Lois. *That* is a well-known fact!" retorted Crispin.

Without a word, Lois made a jump at Crispin, and caught him a stinging box on his ear.

"Bless me! don't let us have any bloodshed, my dear people, don't!" and Julius tittered again. "Supposing we pass it round, as the children at school say. Now, Judy, you hop up, like a cockatoo, and have a peck at me! But, to proceed with the case, allow me to tell you that was a bad move of yours, Lois; you have shown yourself guilty. Meanwhile we are waiting for your communication, Crispin."

Crispin was looking decidedly rueful, but seeing everyone else smiling, he smiled too.

"I had no idea you were so plucky, Lois," said he. "Well, I say there is someone in love, and manage their meetings rather oddly."

"How so?"

"Why, Mr. Lawyer, they meet in the Druid's Grove by moonlight, not that there's much moonlight there though."

"In the Druids' Grove! Dismal place, I should say, to do spoons! I wonder if it inspires them with poetical notions? Did you hear any thrilling ditties, Crispin?"

"No, I can't say I did; I was rather too much astonished at the sight, I can tell you."

"Astonished! Then it must have been old Nurse Joyce in the arms of Blake, for all the rest have beaux, I am sure."

"No, it was not nurse; it was not one of the servants. It was someone standing round this table!"

There was unbroken silence for a second, then Durill exclaimed—

"What are you talking about, Crispin?"

Lois looked ready to cry.

"You are not surely going to say that *I* was in the Druids' Grove!"

"No, Lois, it was not you, so make your mind easy."

Durill fired up.

"Then it rests with Judy and May. How dare you say one of them met a man in the Druids' Grove to-night? What do you mean by saying such a thing of your sisters?"

"I dare say it very well, for I saw it. I have eyes in my head, as good as other people's."

Julius gave a prolonged whistle, and at the end of it told Lois to shut the door.

"Don't let the servants hear this."

Judy and May were very pale indeed, and looking at each other earnestly; there was no laughing now.

"Now, Crispin, be so kind as to relate what you have seen or heard. You have made a declaration that requires proof. It is a serious

matter saying you saw one of your sisters out holding converse with a man clandestinely at night time. Why did you not go and speak to them?"

"How could I? I took it for one of the maids at first."

"And how did you discover your mistake?" sharply asked Julius.

"Why, I had better begin at the beginning, and then you will understand it better. I was coming up from the village, and when I got to the top of the Grove I heard a man's voice laughing, I fancy, and then a woman's. Then there was a pause, and I stopped, and in a minute or so I heard them again. When I got to the end of the Grove, I looked down, and saw the figure of a woman in a light dress, and a man—a tall fellow. He was standing close to the trees. They were both under the 'Druids' Tree.' I concluded it was one of the maids, as I said

before, talking to her lover. I supposed he had come up the wood way; and I walked into the court-yard. In about five minutes the woman came flying along, and, to my surprise, turned in at the side-door, for she did not come down the court-yard. Now, then, the servants never go in that way, and besides, I know the difference between a lady and a servant."

"And what makes you sure it was not Lois?"

"Because it was too tall for Lois, and the hair was dark, besides the dress was not white."

"Then what colour was it?" questioned Julius.

"I cannot say, but it was not white; the moonlight does not enable anyone to be positive as to the exact shade of any light colour, you know, Julius."

"That is quite true, Crispin, and as May happens to have on a light mauve, and Judy a silver grey, you could not tell one from the other in the moonlight. Yet I won't allow that to

strengthen your argument, that it must have been one of these two," pointing to Judy and May.

Durill seemed to have been bottling up his wrath all the time, but now he let a little out; his eyes flashing, and his Apollo-like form drawn to its full height.

"Look, here, sir, if you don't mind what you are saying, I shall have a little business to settle with you myself. I don't credit a single word of this cock-and-bull story. I don't doubt that you did see a female in a light dress, but not either of your sisters I am very well sure. The idea of such nonsense—it is preposterous, sir, and you deserve a good horsewhipping for offering them such an insult. You come in here and right away accuse them of a most improper and unladylike action, a thing we only expect to see Jane or Maria, the waiting-maid do. You have gone a step too far, Crispin, this time, I tell you. And,

pray, who is there your sisters would be likely to meet ?"

"Oh, I can't say; though that fellow Norton is back, I hear, he—"

"Silence, Crispin, or I'll make you!" shouted Julius.

Judy's face was deathlike, and at the first mention of the name her hands had been raised wildly. Now, however, she was calm, and turning to Crispin, who looked startled at what he had done, said—

"That was a clever shot of yours, Crispin, but I did not expect it from you."

Julius went to her kindly.

"Judy, dear girl, Crispin does not mean to imply that it was you and Harry Norton under the 'Druids' tree.' We would none of us believe him."

"Would you not? I am glad of that. There, Julius, I am all right—I am not going to faint," and she smiled.

Crispin never said a word as to his belief whether it was Harry Norton and Judy or not, and May turned to him.

Durill interrupted her.

"Wait a second, May, dear. Crispin, how long is it since you saw this scene?"

"About an hour, I should say."

"Well, then, look here, I will prove to you that it was neither of your sisters. May was in the drawing-room part of that time, and then she went to the snuggery, and Judy was there all the time; so, you see, it was not either of them."

Now Durill spoke in all good faith. He knew May was there, because she went to write him some letters, and he supposed Judy was there also, as he and May met her by the door, and she knew the fire was not out. May did not tell him she had been in the room alone and left it empty, that she had not seen Judy till they met her by the door. So Durill seemed quite certain he had

proved their innocence, and May was only too well pleased to have it so; but she spoke to Crispin, nevertheless, in a dignified manner that went a long way.

"I think we have had enough of this nonsense. It is not of the least consequence whether it was Judy or I you saw in the Grove, Crispin. I for my part have not the least intention of attempting to clear myself—I care nothing about it. If I choose to go out, I shall go, and you may watch me if you like; it will make no difference to me. I shall not satisfy you by either confessing my guilt or declaring my innocence, and I am sure Judy will not do it. So there is an end of the matter, and you can tell it to just as many as you feel disposed, and I think none the better of you for your spying propensities."

Durill smiled. May had given Crispin a set down, and done it better than any of the others could. There was something to be proud of in

that pale-faced girl in the mauve dress. Judy looked grateful, and kept silent. May's attack, made in such a cool calm tone, her open statement that she treated it with indifference, and would not say whether it was her or not, took Crispin by storm, and for the instant he felt staggered.

"Well, May, all I have to say is, I could have sworn it was either you or Judy I saw, and if it was not, it was your ghost."

Lois gave a little shriek.

"Oh, dear, Crispin! you horrid thing! I sha'n't sleep a wink this night. I wonder what will be seen next. First of all, K—"

"Lois, are you insane?" exclaimed May. "What are you about, talking such rubbish?"

At this, Lois recollected herself, and pouted, but that did not distress May; all she desired was to stop her tongue.

"I don't know about rubbish, May," went on

Crispin; "but your ghost was abroad to-night, if you were not."

"Then it was me, not Judy?" laughed May.

"Yes, I thought it was you, to tell the truth, May, and that was what made me so surprised, and knowing one tall fellow who admires you, I came to the conclusion that it was you, and no one else, but I did not like to say it out right."

"And don't say it now, Crispin; let the tall fellow alone."

May's cheeks were burning. Durill seemed amused, and murmured—

"So that is it, is it, May?"

"No, Durill, it's not; but I cannot explain what it is."

"We are getting into riddles," said Julius. "Now, Crispin, don't you think the most probable solution of this mystery is that you are bilious and see double?"

Julius put the question in a knowing sort of

way, with his head a little on one side. Crispin looked indignant, and the others laughed.

"Do you think I look bilious?" asked he.

No that he did not; his blue eyes were clear and bright enough.

"It is no use trying to persuade me I fancied it, Julius, because I did not. I never saw anything supernatural before, but I declare I saw it this night."

"But, though Wild Wood has the reputation of ghosts, &c., I never heard of any taking the form of May Drever; indeed, I am not sure whether there ever was a May before this one."

"Yes, there was, Julius," said Durill; "I know that much, but she lived a very long time ago, and was a pious woman. What she wants prowling about now, I cannot imagine. Don't let this story get wind. It is all very well for us to discuss it, but servants generally believe in ghosts, and such like, and it is not well to have

such stories about. What do you think of your namesake coming to visit you, May?"

"I should rather like to see her, Durill; she might make me pious."

"I'll tell you what it is, May. You have been doing something wicked, and she has gathered her dust out of the vault, and come to rebuke you. She will catch you going along the corridor in the dark, and administer a good thump on your back. Sing out, May, and I'll come and give her ladyship another."

"Very well, Julius, I shall remember that," said May, laughing. "I suppose you are not going on with your match, Julius, after this sensational interruption; it would be rather tame after a ghost."

"Yes, it certainly would, eh, Lois?"

"Oh, dear, yes; and besides, I should be sure to lose, and as the game was stopped, it does not hold good."

"That means that you won't pay me my gloves?"

"Precisely."

And Lois made a charming little curtsey, and skipped about, laughing.

May left the room, and she had not got near the drawing-room door before someone pulled her dress. It was Judy.

"May, I want to thank you, love, for your ready and effectual help."

She seemed very much discomposed, and her breath was coming short and fast; she looked at May in a half-terrified manner, and waited for her to speak, nervously playing with her necklace. May raised her eyes.

"You are quite welcome to my help now, and at any time, Judy."

"Don't go yet, May!" for she was already moving on.

"Well, what is it?"

"May, don't speak so shortly; it cuts me, child," wailed Judy. "You have taken the blame of to-night's work without a murmur, and screened me, and all the time I know what you think, May."

"What would you like me to think, Judy? what do you suppose I can think? I know I was not under the 'Druids' Tree;' but you know you were, and I know it."

"May, have pity, I was driven to it, I was indeed; I could not help myself."

"Come in here, Judy," said May, opening the library door, near which they were standing. "Someone will be coming along presently. What crying? Surely, Judy, you need not do that."

"Yes I need; I am wretched," sobbed Judy, dropping into a chair. "I thought I should have died, May, when Crispin blurted out his story. The shame I felt was something dreadful, and I was helpless; I dared not say a single word."

"And why not? Who were you with, Judy, that is the point?"

"May, I cannot tell you."

"Then you were with Harry Norton? Oh! Judy, I did not think it of you; after knowing that man's character you are actually meeting him secretly on your father's own ground. If I must do such a thing, I would do it openly; you are of age, and at liberty to marry him if you like. I don't believe papa would try to prevent you, since you really mean to ignore his wishes and advice. But to carry on as you are doing is nothing short of disgraceful, and I hope you will stop it."

"May, don't be so hard on Harry; he was made out worse than he really was. But I did not say I was going to marry him; I did not say it was even him I was speaking to under the 'Druids' Tree.'"

"Then, Judy, never mind; don't try to throw dust in my eyes. I had rather you said nothing

than endeavour to deceive me. It is none of my business whom you meet; I have no right to lecture you, and I don't want to. I only spoke because it seems to me a senseless trick in one so old as you are, Judy."

"I know perfectly well you say what is right, and nothing but the truth; yet I am powerless, May. I only wish I could tell you, May dear, but even that I may not do. All I can say is help me to keep the secret, May, I implore you; it is as much yours as mine; it belongs to us all, May. Will you do it now?"

Judy was excited—a strange thing for her—and the tears were still wet on her cheeks.

"Judy," exclaimed May, "you amaze me. What have I to do with it?"

"You have, believe me, May. I am trying to do the best for us all."

"But how do you know you are doing the best, Judy?"

"I know what you would say, May; you doubt

my ability to choose the right course? Well, I don't know, since you put the question, but I believe I am doing for the best; at any rate, I wish to do. But, May, I do want your help. The fight is unequal. And I confess I am no match for Crispin with his sharp eyes. They will all watch me now, and how to delude them I cannot think."

"Why delude them at all, Judy? why go out again?"

"It must be, May, and that is the exact point. If I should have to meet the person again, and am missed, I want you to screen me, make some suitable excuse. Countenance me, and then I shall not be so fearful."

"Listen! How do you know some of the servants did not see you to-night, as well as Crispin? If so they will noise it abroad, and declare the ghost of old is about!"

"No, I feel sure no one saw me but Crispin, and I saw him, May. However, it is no use

speculating, I must brave it out; but just you give an eye to the side door at nights, for fear I should get locked out."

"Yes, I can do that, though Blake is on the watch now, because that other night you went he found it open, and I heard a great fuss being made about it by him and Mrs. Morrison."

"Oh, dear! everything seems to go against me."

"And I can tell you why, Judy; because you are doing wrong, so don't try to pacify your conscience. Whatever the secret is it is wrong, I am fully persuaded, and no good will come of it, that you will find."

Judy jumped up

"May, you terrify me; heaven knows I don't want to do wrong, but I am in a corner, I know that I am."

"Well, don't put your face in, put your back in; always keep the danger in sight, Judy, and you will have a better chance."

"May, we are not all like you, you are morally strong and clear-headed; though I am so much your senior, I feel weak and unable to cope with this; I wish I could leave it in your hands."

"Well," replied May, laughing quietly, "I get the credit of taking moonlight rambles, or, at least, my ghost does. It is fortunate we are alike."

"We are not at all alike, only in size, and having dark hair. Nay, the fortune seems to me to be in us both wearing the same shaded dresses to-night."

"We had better try and correspond in that matter for a little."

"Unfortunately most of my dresses are dark, so you had better let me know when you are going to 'see the moon rise.'"

"Oh! May, you had me there. Well, well, we had better go to the rest, or they will be going to the Druids' Grove in a body to watch for the ghost. You will aid me, May?"

"I suppose I must, but I don't half like it. It is hazardous work aiding and abetting anyone in a mystery. I don't like mysteries, Judy."

"I know that, they are not in your line. But bear with me—trust me, May. I am acting for the best, according to my belief, God knows I am."

Nothing more was said, May avoided the subject, even to Durill, who talked everything over with her. But Durill was dreadfully busy at present, with the estate affairs, which owing to his engineering had got behind hand, and May and he were at it early and late. The Squire trusted all to Durill, and he would not have had anything go wrong for a kingdom. His honour was at stake, a different sort of honour to Crispin's. Besides, May could divulge nothing; if he had asked her she could not tell of poor Judy, so she hugged herself securely, and hoped he would treat it with contempt.

CHAPTER VIII.

One morning, not many days after Crispin's ghost, the post came in rather late, and the family were in the middle of breakfast. It was Blake's duty to open the bag and sort the letters. Everyone had letters, and each one alike. A little, delicate note, silver edged.

"I wonder what it is about," cried Lois, "it looks like a card to me."

"Open it, and see, dear," said Madam.

Lois was not slow to do it, and instantly called out—

"There, I was right, it is an invitation to a dance at Mr. Gradwell's on the 22nd; how delightful. Aren't you going to open yours, May?"

"No; you have told the contents, so there is no need to."

"May does not care so much about balls as you do, Lois," said the Squire, looking fondly at May.

"No, indeed," answered Madam, "May is a perfect old woman. I cannot imagine who she takes after—the Drevers, most assuredly."

"Without doubt," replied the Squire, "May is a true Drever. You would rather have been a Benton, perhaps, May?"

"No, indeed, papa, I prefer being what I am. I think there is a fair sprinkling of Bentons amongst us."

"That's right, May. I rejoice to see everyone does not go over to the side of beauty. One or two ornaments in a house are sufficient, in my opinion."

"Really, you are very complimentary. Lois, my love, do you hear what your papa is saying?"

"No I did not, mamma; what is it, papa?"

"Nothing now, Lois," he said, smiling, "and nothing to interest you, therefore we will not repeat it, my dear."

"A wise resolution, John," answered Madam. "Have you any hot toast down there, Julius?"

"Yes, mother. I beg you pardon, I thought you had some at your end?"

Madam laughed.

"Yes, we had some, but it is all gone; we are more hungry up here, this morning, than you it seems. That letter might be Greek, Julius, from the way you have been studying it?"

"Well, it is almost as bad, in fact Greek would be easy to me."

"Then you have not quite forgotten your Greek, Julius? I am glad of that."

"Oh, no, sir, I have not. I often require it—that is a little."

"Is it bad writing, Julius," asked Crispin?

"Yes, it is bad writing, and not too good spelling either, but it is not that which puzzles me. Never mind, perhaps I shall discover it after a bit."

And he put the epistle in his pocket, and went on with his breakfast.

May and Durill had been at work some time when the door opened, and in came Julius, looking very serious indeed.

"Are you two very busy; can you spare me a few minutes?"

"Yes, certainly, Julius, sit down; lift that book off the couch, and make yourself comfortable. I am afraid we keep an untidy room, May, my darling?"

"Yes, we do, indeed, Durill; but it cannot be helped while there is so much to be done. I wish you would tell me what this is?"

"A new spring to carriage—who got that done? Jenkinson knows nothing of it, because

I had him in yesterday, and it is a matter altogether of £4 14s. 9d."

"A new spring? Oh! I recollect it was done for Mother a month or two back, while Jenkinson was bad with lumbago. She complained that it jolted her and Lois very much one day going to Guildford, so I had it seen to. Yes, that's all right, May, I don't think the charge high either, putting all the items together. Morgan is a just man."

"Very good; now I have done—you have been very patient, Julius. I won't get bothered again if possible."

"You don't often get bothered, May. I think I shall get you to come and assist me during my busy time."

"Indeed, you won't; I can't spare May, she does the work of two bailiffs. The things are in order now, and better looked after than when the Squire had Pennell. And it is a clear saving of a

hundred a-year; half of which May ought to have, for she does all the in-door work, writing, bills, accounts, &c.; and has a memory as long as one's arm. No, no, Julius, my dear fellow, you cannot have May, even if May would leave me. Would you, May?"

"No, of course not; but I would help Julius for a little time, if he wants me of course."

"Then help me now, May, for I am in a fix. Look here at this effusion I received this morning; I can make neither head nor tail of it."

He handed to May a letter written on half a sheet of common, and not too clean paper. The writing looked as if it had been done with a pin, and his name was spelt wrongly in the letter, but right on the envelope. It ran thus—

"The time will soone be up, and if you are not to the pointe, I shall do what I threttnd last time. I will have no more put offs.

"Moses."

May turned it over and over, then, without a word, handed it to Durill, who, leaning on his elbows, watched in amazement.

"What is it, May?"

"Read it. I cannot make anything of it, Julius, excepting that Moses threatens to do something or other to you if you don't come to the point."

"What have you been about?"

"Nothing at all. I have not the remotest idea who Moses is, in the first place. And I cannot find him because there is no address given. It comes from London, the post mark shows, but I know no Moses, I am positive; besides, I have no engagement to meet. I have come to the conclusion that it is a trick. If it is, it is a fool's trick."

"I don't like the look of this document, Julius," said Durill, who had been attentively examining it. "And what a queer, dirty smell

it has! It has come out of no clean hands that is pretty evident."

"I agree with you. There is a disreputable look about the thing. It is the very first time such a thing ever came to me, and I don't understand it. I can recollect no one of the name of Moses; indeed, I have never had to do with any Jew but Solomon Barnard, and his trial was over three months ago."

"Solomon Barnard, the merchant! I remember; he had a case of fraud on. What became of the clerk? I forget, if ever I heard."

"Stephen Tilly? He was transported for nine years, I fancy. But this note cannot have anything to do with Mr. Barnard, or his case. I shall let the thing alone, and it may take its chance, and Mr. Moses may do his worst."

"I don't see what else you can do, Julius. What do you say it smells of, Durill?"

"Indeed, I don't know, May; everything that

is nasty. The two foremost being brandy and opium. I never saw such a bad-looking epistle, I must say. Catch, May."

"Yes, it does smell nasty. I advise you to preserve this, Julius; it may be useful. There is certain to be another; these things never come singly."

"No, I suppose they don't. I wish you would keep it for me, May. I have no papers of consequence with me, and being entirely free, ten to one I should forget that, and lose or burn it."

"Yes, I will keep it. Look, both of you, I put it in this private account drawer. So it will be quite safe till you want it, Julius."

"Thank you, May; but I hope I sha'n't want it. I have so much to do with other people's mysteries, that I don't care to have any of my own, and besides, it would not pay."

"No, and that is the pivot upon which nearly all our affairs turn. By the way, May, I was on the point of buying you a dog yesterday."

"A dog, Durill! What sort? I should like one very much."

"Should you? Then you shall have this. I never saw a prettier thing—a pure Pomeranean, only six months old. I have the man's name and address, and I will send to him for it. The little fellow is named 'Ponto;' he was the pet of a little girl who died, and then they sold the dog. You shall have him, my dear."

"Thank you; but is he good-tempered, because of the children? Evelyn would be for ever kissing him, and hiding her face in his long wool."

"Yes, he is quiet, so he won't hurt your pets."

"You care a great deal for those babies, May. You and Durill own them; they say they are 'Aunty May's children!'"

"Do they? Well, I love them dearly. I should feel it much if anything went amiss with either of them. Do you know, Julius, I think Ivo would make a good barrister; he is wonder-

fully long-headed for so young a child. And Gilbert will never be in a position to do anything for him, so it will fall to our lot to place him."

"That is a good idea of yours, May; you begin early to think for your children. It is quite wise of you to watch and see what they show talent for. Yes, I agree with you; Ivo is long-headed, and if nothing happens, and he is willing when the time arrives, I have no objection to take him. But I will tell you what I will do, May. I will at any time be most happy to take a boy of yours, for if they are anything like their mother they will make fizzing barristers."

"Hear, hear, Julius! Bravo! I echo your sentiment. A lad of May's would be a credit to the Bar. That puts me in mind, May, I have a crow to pluck with you."

"With me? What about? I shall get frightened presently."

"No, you won't. It is in reference to Crispin's

ghost. He alluded to a certain long and broad gentleman who was spoony on you. Now, what about it?"

"Nothing, that I am aware of."

"Don't try to put me off. Are you spoony?"

"'Do I look it?' as Crispin said, when Julius said he was bilious?"

Durill laughed. "No you don't, but yet you may be; you rarely look anything but calm and self-possessed."

"Then that feeling would sure to prove an exception to the rule, and I should look it. So you need never ask me, Durill—you will be able to judge for yourself."

"Well done, May," laughed Julius, "you got out of that capitally. She is a match for you, Sir Durill. So as the small boys say, 'mind your eye.' Talking about that ghost business, though, I was nearly putting myself into violent exercise on that occasion."

"How so; what were you going to do?"

"Why, I all but thrashed Crispin for throwing that stone at poor old Judy. It was as cowardly and mean a trick as ever I saw done; and she felt it too, poor girl. I wonder how he got to know that Norton was back?"

"Is he? I did not like to ask Crispin; have you seen him, Julius?"

"No, Durill, I have not, but his cousin, Frank Kipling, told me he was in England—in the north somewhere—I believe he said. He cannot stay long though, because his family won't receive him—that is his mother and brothers. As for his uncle, he nearly has apoplexy every time his name is mentioned, so Frank said. Judy cared for him, and if I mistake not cares for him still. Well, I suppose she can have the handsome devil, and his five hundred a-year (if there is that much left), if she wants him, but I should be sorry to see the day."

"So should I, Julius. But that affair did for Judy; she will not have anything to say to anyone now. I shall always believe that Gilbert was to blame for that."

"That's precisely my opinion," said May, "and I agree with you, Julius, Cris wanted boxing for naming him. I thought at one time you would have done it, Durill, but I had rather it had been Julius, Crispin would stand such a poor chance with you."

"Yes, he would, May. Why, if Durill by accident fell on him he would be crushed. I say, about this hop at the Gradwell's, who's going? If you do, Durill, you cannot possibly dance, you know. I should not spring on the same spot after you if I knew it, for fear of finding myself reposing on the coals. I verily believe you are growing, Durill?"

"If you don't shut up, Ju, I'll shy this bootjack at you," answered Durill, laughing.

"You are too bad really, Julius."

"Of course you say so, May; it is your beloved Durill who is being teased; it is a bad look out for your husband when you get him, May, if you are to leave half your heart in Durill's keeping."

"My husband will be obliged to content himself with what I have to spare, but he is far enough off at present."

"Why on earth don't you get married, Durill? A great jolly fellow like you, the future Squire, and single?"

"Allow me to return the question—why don't you? A rising barrister, and a good-looking, clever fellow, with a nice income?"

"To tell the truth, I don't see anyone I really like. Kate Calvert is the first on the list—but that's no go, she won't have me—so I must just bide my time, and she'll come some time, I suppose.

"Whoe'er she be that not impossible she,
That shall command my heart and me!"

"Do you believe that, Julius? Do you really think there is one special one for each?"

"Yes, I do, May; but you don't often get the right one, worse luck. You recollect those two last verses of 'Endymion.'

> "No one is so accursed by fate,
> No one so utterly desolate,
> But some heart though unknown
> Responds unto his own:—
> Responds—as if with unseen wings,
> An angel touched its quivering strings
> And whispers in its song
> 'Where hast thou stayed so long?' "

"Yes, I remember them well; it is a queer notion, though, somewhere there is a kindred spirit, two alike. Then you believe in what people style 'A current of electricity between two bodies?' but what I phrase 'One soul for two people.' "

"May, my dear, girl," ejaculated Durill, opening wide his big eyes.

"Nay, Durill, you be quiet, May is right. You express it better than anyone I have heard yet.

It is but one soul, literally speaking, for each is part and parcel of the other. I believe what you say is true, May; my practice has brought some curious instances under my notice, and were they not private, I should be almost tempted to lay them before the public. I don't pretend to say that this affinity of soul is a thing to be met with every day, but it does exist. I don't know that it is so with two of the same sex; I never noticed it excepting between male and female. It is a wonderful and awful mystery—that God should have put a chord in the hearts of two distinct and widely divided people exactly the same is what we shall never understand. He had some object in view when He did it, without doubt. And my impression is, those two souls were intended to unite. Ask anyone who has met that fellow soul, and hear what they will say. There is a something stronger than their own will that draws them to that person, and some-

times they feel they are near to them, and, at others, without the least cause, they will think of each other at the same instant. Now, that is not so with everyone, so it shows there is relation between those two souls. And I should not wonder if, in the event of those two people being effectually pushed apart, their lives were useless. Not in the daily routine of every-day duty; but they will never rest, their hearts will always be hankering after something else. Everyone has some aim in life—they will have none—each is useless without the other."

"But, Julius, in the event of death to either of those people; how will it be then?"

"I cannot dig so deep, May; I don't know that there would be the same mysterious power in force after death; I am inclined to believe that it would, though, because we are not cut off from each other, you know, though we are calmed and contented."

"Now, Julius, look here, my dear fellow. You say there is one for each you think; one particular one that would suit better than any other. How are you going to fix it when people marry three or four times?"

"May, I leave that in your hands. I should like to hear what you think about it."

"I have no objection to answer it, Julius, because I have an idea. I don't believe that *every* marriage is 'heart to heart, soul to soul.' There is a higher love, a pure, holy inspiration that not everyone feels. It would not be well, perhaps, to have it so, because such love could only come once. And, as you said to me, Durill, when we were having a discussion rather like this, if each person only loved once, what would become of those disappointed, and widows and widowers?' "

"Thanks, May, you have given my answer beautifully. Are you satisfied, Durill?"

"Yes, I believe so. May, are you?"

"Quite, Durill. I am content to leave that mystery in the hands of the One who made it a mystery. And I think we have wasted time enough already, talking about things over our heads, and I am not half through this pile of papers."

"Well, I'm off. All the better for exchanging ideas with you two. Take care of that clean letter May?"

"Yes, you may be sure I shall. I wish you would do something for me, Julius?"

"Yes, I will. What is it?"

"Tell Parker I wish the children to go out now while the sun is out; but they must not have 'Moppett,' it is too cold to ride.'"

"Yes, Lady May; and very likely I'll go with them. I want to send a telegram to Beal."

"Mind you don't get flirting with Parker?"

Durill laughed.

"Do you hear, Julius?"

"Yes, I hear."

"Then mind you attend, sir; and shut that door, the draught is terrific, it nearly cuts one's legs off."

CHAPTER IX.

After the departure of Julius there was profound silence, and the work progressed rapidly. Presently Durill yawned and stretched himself.

"Take a rest, May?"

"What for?"

"Because I want you to, that's what for."

"Wait a second. There, that is done;" and May laid down her pen, and looked up.

"Now, what is it?"

Druill was balancing his chair on its hind legs, with his head touching the mantle-piece, and his eyes half-closed.

"What about the party, May?"

"Well, we cannot all go, that is quite evident. So there must be a division; Lois, Crispin, and Julius must go. I don't care about it; I don't think any of my dresses are fit, for one thing; and, for another, I don't care enough about it to get a new one."

"No, I don't suppose you do; but you did not go to that party at the Rectory. Should you not like to go to the Gradwell's, May?"

"No, I should not. I would rather have a long evening by myself. Do you want to go, Durill?"

"Yes, for some things; but I don't suppose it would do any good, so I sha'nt. I am not a dancing man, and I shall stay at home with you, darling. Is that to be it, May?"

"Yes, indeed! only I fear you are staying on my account."

Durill smiled, and lighted his pipe.

"May me tum in?" called a small voice at the door.

"There's the child, May; open the door, please, dear."

May did so, and in trotted little Evelyn.

"Pease dive Evelyn a penny, Uncle Durill?"

"A penny! what for, little one? You are so far down, I cannot see you. There, that's better," added he, putting her on the table.

"Durill, do you know you have put the child to sit on the bill file?"

"Bless me—have I? Are you hurt, trot?"

"Ris," answered Evelyn.

"Poor little girly, let me see? Yes, it is a bit red too. Kiss, uncle, he did not mean to do it."

Evelyn needed no second bidding. She clasped her short arms round his neck, and gave him twenty sweet kisses.

"And how came you to leave Ivo and Parker?" asked May.

"Me wanted to tum for a penny. You dive me one, Uncle Durill?"

"Yes, that I will. What will you buy with it?"

"A ponge take."

"Well, I have not got a penny, but I have got this," holding a sixpence on the tip of his finger. "I daresay it will do as well."

Evelyn jumped with delight, and rolled all over the table.

"Why, Evelyn, you have no gaiters on, my child," cried May, turning her over. "How's that?"

"Uncle Doolius dot them, Aunty May."

"Uncle—why, Julius, where are Evelyn's gaiters?" asked May, as he entered the room.

"Here; the little gipsy was leading her Aunt Judy such a dance, that I offered my services, and she ran off, and a fine chase I have had after her. You had better try your hand, May;" and he put the scarlet woollen things on the table.

"Come, now, Evelyn, darling, and let aunty put your gaiters on, else you cannot go and spend your silver sixpence."

It was a rather difficult job to get them on Miss Evelyn's stout legs, but May was patient and steady, and Durill held the legs alternately, so it was accomplished in a short time; much to Julius' astonishment, who had witnessed poor Judy's ineffectual struggles in the nursery.

"You are a capital hand with the youngsters, May; I suppose this is not the first time you and Durill have done such things?"

Durill laughed.

"I should say not. I have officiated on a variety of occasions, Julius; haven't I, Evelyn?"

"Ris. You put me on the lop—"

"Never mind that, dear," said May, kindly.

Julius and Durill were laughing heartily; seeing which, Evelyn began laughing too. May lifted her down.

"Now, Julius, Evelyn is ready to go."

"All right; come along baby."

Julius walked off, Evelyn trotting by his side holding a piece of his trouser. She was too little for anyone to take her hand with ease, so she never made the least ado, but grabbed hold of a portion of the dress or trouser, as the case might be, and stamped along sturdily.

"I should not like to part with those children, May, they have done us all a great deal of good. Bless the little pets."

"Yes, a child is a great comfort when properly managed; and, on the contrary, nothing is worse or more tedious than a spoilt child. But, Durill, if a change occurred, and you were master, Gilbert could not expect them to remain; a father is different to a brother. Besides, you will marry?"

"Some day, I hope. I never look at Evelyn without wanting one of my own. But, as regards

that change, whenever it comes, it will never oblige the children to go. They shall not be set adrift; you will see to them for me, May, and when you marry we will look to them between us."

"Yes, I will stay by the children, Durill, through thick and thin. They are like us, fortunately, pure Drevers. I have been on the look out ever since they came to detect some of the Benton or their mother's peculiarities. But, no, they are really good, intelligent children, and I feel pretty easy about them. Ivo, I believe, will turn out a credit to us; that child has great ability. He has astonished me several times, and he can learn anything; he is wonderfully quick. Not that superficial quickness that is so deceptive in young children, and so often deceives people. But he really understands, and can twist his knowledge about and apply it. I am much pleased with Ivo, and he must have a good education somehow."

"Yes, he must; we must manage that, May. I wonder how Gilbert expects the lad to be educated and started in the world?"

"I don't believe he ever thinks anything about it. He seems to me satisfied now they are here. And, do you know, Durill, the little things rarely mention their father or mother; that time appears to have faded out of their memories. They used to speak of some Sarah who was the nurse or servant, or something of that kind. But they have forgotten her now; I am not sorry either, I must confess."

"No; it is better so. Poor little things, I am glad they are here."

At dinner Madam asked—

"Who is going to this party; are you, Julius?"

"Well, I did think about it; I should then be able to renew my acquaintance with several people I have not yet seen; but, of course, it is

ladies before gentlemen, so I shall wait their decision."

"Certainly; but your sisters cannot go alone. Durill, you are of the party, I presume?"

"No, mother, I am not; May and I have decided to remain at home and dance with each other."

"You two, again; there is really no good to be done with you. I am quite ashamed of May."

May's only reply was a smile.

"Crispin and I are going, mamma," said Lois, looking up from her plate. "Will you get me some forcemeat, James? and Julius will, I fancy. Judy, what do you say?"

"I say no, Lois."

"But, Judy, Mrs. Gradwell will not thank us for being odd. We ought to be two ladies to two gentlemen?"

"Yes, Judy, Lois is correct, I think," said

Madam, "and you had better arrange it so, you four; and pray see the acceptances go out in good time. It is rather a short invitation."

So it was settled. The party fell on a Wednesday, and for two or three days Lois had been having one of the carriages to run her to Guildford, and down to Minnie's. About four in the afternoon Mrs. Mark Calvert arrived to spend the evening, and Mark would come for dinner, if possible. Minnie went up-stairs at once, and very little was seen of her till dinner time. Durill came in about five minutes before dressing time, and knocked at May's door.

"Come in," said May.

"What do you think I have heard from Hardwick, May?"

"I am sure I cannot guess; nothing bad, I trust?"

"Charles Blackett is down here staying with the Hopwoods. Hardwick asked me if I knew

him; so depend upon it he will be at this gathering to-night, and that is what all the flying to Guildford has been for."

"Is it possible! Lois is awfully sly. I wonder what has brought him down here?"

"Can't say, I'm sure; he came on Saturday, I fancy; it is curious he did not appear at church."

"Very; and I can't think how Lois got to know. This is the first I have heard of it?"

"She would hear from Minnie, fast enough; by the way, she is here—is she not?"

"Yes; come to superintend the dressing of Lois, I suppose, though Dermot is quite equal to it. But Minnie finds fault, and says she is the old style. She wanted mamma, some time back, to get a French maid, and she was all but engaged, when something happened, and it fell through."

Durill grunted.

"A blessing it did, I should say. We are done out of our quiet evening, May?"

"Yes, I fear so; don't be long, Durill, because I am just ready."

Mark did not come to dinner; much to May's disappointment; she was very fond of good-natured Mark.

"Where is Mr. Crispin, Blake?" asked Madam, when they sat down.

"I don't know, Madam; he is not about."

"Then keep his dinner hot for him, he will be sure to want it when he does come."

"Yes, Madam," replied Blake.

The Squire looked grave; he never allowed meals to be kept for anyone, unless they were unavoidably detained; when they were boys they had to go without if they did not come in time. But the yellow-haired ones generally got it; their mother saw to that. There were rules observed in the Drever family, generations old. One was, always dressing for dinner. No matter what was to do, the Squire always appeared in evening

dress, and he would allow no one to sit at the table without being in dinner costume. Another was, regularity; the gong sounded to the second, and the young fellows were seen leaping down stairs, many a time. Eight o'clock struck, and May was playing an accompaniment for Durill; they were alone in the great drawing-room. The Squire was in his study, writing, and the rest were dressing.

"Durill, you are a little flat there; it does—"

May's speech was cut short by Minnie rushing into the room, in her rustling blue silk.

"May, I wish you would come up-stairs for a moment and try what you can do?"

"What is it? I hope nobody's dress is too tight. I don't feel disposed to skin my fingers to-night."

"What foolery," exclaimed Durill, when he saw May rise. "Why can't you call the maids, or Blake; there are plenty of them in the house,

and leave May alone. It is always the way; when anything is wanted, you come for May."

"There, don't be angry, Durill, May shan't be kept long," answered Minnie, smiling. "But I don't know that anyone else will do—come, May."

When they reached the corridor, May asked—

"Where to, Minnie?"

"Judy's rooms."

Then they proceeded, and the first thing May saw, was Judy standing by the fire ready dressed. Very nice she looked in white silk. May stood and gazed; Judy was dreadfully pale, and it was intensified by the pearl ornaments and white dress. May slightly shook her head, but said nothing.

"How do you think she looks, May?" cried Minnie, impatiently.

"The effect is not good, there is too much white about you, Judy."

"There; that is precisely what we all say.

She will persist in wearing these"—pointing to the pearls—" and they just make you look like a corpse, Judy. It is dreadful; everyone will exclaim you are like a ghost. Pray put on your emeralds and diamonds, that will take the glare off the white."

" No, I had rather not, Minnie," and Judy glanced at May.

" I really think I would make the alteration, Judy, were I you," said May. " You are very pale, and the pearls are too trying for you."

" I never knew anyone so ridiculous as you are, Judy. Mamma will be very angry when she sees you, because she is so particular that we should always look well, and be dressed with taste," chimed in Minnie.

" Stop, Minnie!" cried Judy; for Minnie was going towards the toilet table on which stood Judy's jewel case. " I cannot wear that set to-night."

"And why not?" asked a voice behind them.

They turned—there stood Madam.

"What is the matter? Are you not well, Judy?"

"Yes, quite well, thank you, mamma."

"The truth is, mamma, Judy won't wear her emeralds and diamonds, and those pearls make her look ghastly."

Madam came close and surveyed Judy critically.

"Minnie is quite correct. You cannot go that way, Judy, the effect is shocking. I could not allow you to appear, my dear; you must either change your ornaments or your dress."

Here was a business; Judy looked hopeless.

"May, will you lend me your dead gold ones, love?"

"Yes, with pleasure, Judy," and May began unclasping them.

"Where are your own, Judy?" asked Madam,

in amazement. "You have the family jewels; you need not rob poor May of her insignificant ones, I am sure."

The family jewels, mentioned by Madam, belonged to the Drever side; they went with the estate. But the present Madam Drever having her own, gave them to the oldest daughter, Judith, to be kept by her till Durill came into possession, when they would be handed to him for his wife. They were extremely valuable and ancient. There were four sets—pearls, emeralds, and diamonds, opals and diamonds, sapphires and rubys.

"Minnie, my darling, get them out for Judith," commanded Madam.

Minnie did so, but suddenly exclaimed—

"Why, Judy, where's the necklace?"

Judy's face was like chalk, and she made a pretence of poking the fire. The poker slipped out of her hand as Minnie asked this question.

"It is at Hutton's, Minnie."

"What was to do with it, Judy?" inquired Madam, turning the gems over tenderly.

"The clasp was out of order, so I sent it."

A very natural thing, indeed, it need not have made Judy's face so white, or her chest heave so. May was astonished, and a sick feeling crept into her heart as she watched.

"Well, put these on, then," and Madam put the opals and diamonds on the table.

Judy made no reply; did not even turn her head, and Madam murmuring something about "dear Lois," turned to leave the room, calling upon Minnie to follow. There was unbroken silence for the next few seconds. Judy's head was bowed low.

"Judy," said May, gently, "are you grieving? don't do that. Put these on, or else you will be late."

Obediently as a child, Judy allowed May to

change the ornaments and put a different flower in the dark bands of hair.

"Here is your fan, Judy. Now, are you ready?"

"Yes, I believe so, May; let us go down."

They found the Squire in the drawing-room, talking to Durill, who was warming his broad back at the first fireplace.

"You look splendid, my dear, Judy; I almost regret being obliged to hand you over to Julius."

The Squire laughed.

"What, and leave May? For shame, Durill."

"And leave May," echoed Durill? "No, sir, I should have taken May with me."

"You are like the portrait of old Madam Judith, Judy, my dear," continued the Squire; "don't you think so, Durill?"

"Yes, sir, I do. There is a likeness to some member of the family in all of us, excepting the fair ones, and they are like my mother's family."

"Indeed, they are," and the old gentleman sighed.

There was a flutter in the hall, and a good deal of laughing, and Lois entered on Crispin's arm, looking sweetly pretty in white lace, over pink silk. Her hair was dressed high—rather in the Pompadour style, and fell in natural waves and curls on her white shoulders. On the top, slightly to the left side, nestled a beautiful blush rose, and from it links of large pearls twined themselves in and out of the hair. She was laughing merrily, and the blue eyes were lovely, while the rosy lips, slightly parted, showed the delicate white teeth. After, came Madam and Minnie on Julius' arm. Madam's face was beaming with pleasure at the picture Lois presented, standing there with Crispin. Any mother might be excused for being proud of such children; they had nothing to wish for on the score of beauty. Lois was really lovely, and her father kissed her fondly.

"So you are here, Judy," cried Julius; "I went to bring you down, and could not find you. But, I suppose, sir, Durill performed that office?"

"No, Julius, I left it for you, and we were both out-done by May. She acted the gallant, and escorted Judy down."

Madam laughed.

"At fault again, my dear May. You quite ignore the rules of society?"

"That is a happy thing, Madam," answered Durill; "so few can afford to do it."

Madam's only reply was a smile, and she turned to the Squire.

"Papa, I think we ought to have one of those girls presented at Court. I shall write to the Duchess about Lois?"

"Please yourself, my dear; their fortunes will not be any larger for it, and without it they will be the Miss Drevers. One or two out of every family have been presented, I know; their Aunt

Adele was; that was how she got her husband, Lord Ainsdale. You are at liberty to continue the rule, if you choose, my dear."

"Oh! to be sure. But Adele's abroad just now, you know, John, so I will not trouble any of the others. I prefer going to my own people, especially about Lois."

"Well, good people, don't you think it is time we made a move, the clocks are just going nine?"

"Yes, quite time, my dears," said Madam.

"The carrage waits," announced old Blake.

"Then, off we go; come, Judy."

They trooped out, Madam calling after Crispin to take care of dear Lois.

"May, come and play for me?" said Durill, when the last sound of the carriage wheels died away.

May willingly complied. He selected "My Queen," and sung it beautifully.

May and he seemed in the humour, and about ten Mark arrived to take his wife home. Then they stopped for a little, and chatted to Mark, who thanked May warmly for the help she had rendered him. The Squire was much pleased, and actually spoke of the time when Durill should have rule. He said he trusted they would ever be near to help him, even if he brought a "Queen" to Wild Wood, because it was not always that a wife would go among the poor.

"Yes, I hope to keep May at hand always. I don't believe I could get along without her," said Durill.

"Indeed, May, I don't thank you for your assistance," cried Minnie. "I have had no rest since; Mark is for ever wanting to know why I cannot do like May."

"It is not everyone that can; people with very refined feelings and delicate nerves cannot witness such scenes," said Madam.

No one made any remark, but a smile rose to Durill's face, and he bent down to May and gently stroked her soft hair.

Madam's speech implied that May was not refined, and had masculine nerves—Durill might well smile. God had never made a more womanly woman (if I may be permitted to use such a phrase) than May Drever. But she was a tender, strong, helpful woman; one who would cling to and work for those she loved, aye, and have died for them if requisite.

Shortly after Mark and Minnie took their departure, and Durill and May returned to the piano.

CHAPTER X.

The carriage rolled swiftly along and landed its precious contents safely at the Gradwell's door. The house was a pretty one and convenient. The passage from the lane to the house door was roofed with glass, and plants lined either side nearly all in flower; the effect was extremely good. The ball room was a new addition; it was intended for a billiard room, and stretched some way out from the house, which, when Mr. Gradwell first got it, was a small, old fashioned place.

Most of the guests had arrived, and one of the most prominent figures upon entering the room

was Tommy Chuckels, who was ambling about like a tame bear. His coat looked as if it had been made for his grandfather in the back woods of America, which place by the way Tommy had visited, and every single thing was done "in America." However he managed to come back is a mystery, and always will remain one. There was some story of his "Ama," walking miles for a letter from Tommy, and going nearly mad when news came that the Southerners had taken sweet Tommy prisoner. The Americans lost caste in my eyes after I heard that story.

They must have wanted a prisoner badly to take poor harmless fool of a Tommy. Any way they let him go soon, which I was not surprised at, for no provisions would have stood Tommy's vigorous attacks. If the Southerners would have given him plenty to eat and drink, and a chair to sit on, he would have lived and died in their company. As it was I have no doubt he shed

tears at parting, and if there was a teaspoonful of anything stronger than water, got drunk.

His sister, Miss Chuckels, was there to keep an eye on Tommy no doubt. She was resplendent in white net puffed longways to the waist, and blue velvet between, and a white silk bodice similarly decorated and *so* low, that it showed just as much of Ellen Chuckels as there was to be seen. The Calverts were there looking very well indeed, only that when the "Wild Wood" party entered, Ruby's face got clouded. Poor little soft kitten.

The dancing went forward briskly, everyone seemed enjoying themselves. Crispin was bowing Miss Edith Anderton about, Julius was chattering to Kate Calvert and finding her very amusing. Little Ruby had fallen to the lot of a tall, thin young man with hair like boiled hay, and she was hanging on his arm with a very disconsolate face indeed. Such was the state of affairs, im-

mediately after a set of quadrilles, when Augustus Gradwell (who was twenty-two that day, and in honour of whom the said party was being held), rushed into the room with a note in his hand. The aforenamed couples happened to be near the door, and the excited young man making a dash at Julius Drever, cried out—

"Whatever do you think, this accounts for the Captain's nonappearance. Poor George has gone to the bottom!"

"My God!" ejaculated Julius; "how did it happen?"

"Can't say, I am sure; the 'Sea Gull' is lost and not a soul saved. Poor Hardwick!"

"Who brought the news?" asked Crispin.

"Chandos Stilwell; he and Captain Hardwick were just setting off, when a telegram arrived; so Chandos came on alone, and brought a few lines from the Captain for my mother. It is dreadful, poor George!"

They were all clustered together in horror, when old Mr. Gradwell bustled up in a state of profuse perspiration.

"My dear Augustus, what *can* you be about, to tell the doleful news to our guests? it will spoil the pleasure of the evening, and cast a gloom over all. Let me beg of you not to let it go any further; it will be well known in the morning, and that will be time enough. It is so sad, poor fellow. Mrs. Gradwell and I would not for worlds that there should be a damp cast upon this festive scene; pray forget it for a little. See, Miss Calvert is quite white."

Yes, poor Kate's face was death-like, and it was well she had hold of Julius' arm, or she might have fallen. But now she was steady; she had heard the intelligence without a sound, but there had been a sea of faces floating before her eyes, and a rush of water to her ears. She half smiled at old Mr. Gradwell, and

murmured something about it being "so sudden." Yes, it was sudden, God knows. Cut down in the prime of life. Kate shut her eyes as if to shut out the remembrance of his dark, splendid face—the face she should never see again.

Julius looked down at the white face by his shoulder, and said, "Let me take you out of here for a bit, Miss Calvert?"

He led the way to a small room at the end of the conservatory, and Judy followed. He placed Kate on a lounge, and said he would go for some water. But she looked at him, and said firmly—

"No, thank you, Mr. Drever, I am quite well; only startled a little. Do you return to the ball room, and your sister and I will follow in a few minutes."

Julius bowed and retired; perhaps he saw he was not wanted. Neither Judy nor Kate spoke for a second, and Kate sat quite still. At last

Judy went to her, and, touching her, said gently—

"Kate?"

"Judy."

Those two words told all there was to tell, and Judy, sitting down, began to speak of him. Kate turned her pale face, from which the roses had utterly fled.

"Oh! Judy, I am not used to the sound yet—dead, dead—I can't believe it; surely he must have been saved?"

"I am afraid not, my poor girl."

Judy felt for her; were they not fellow sufferers?

Kate sat there—her hands clasped—staring at the flowers, and seeing nothing. Nothing but George, in his beauty, floating about on the crest of the waves, with his white face turned upwards, and the moon shining down on it. She almost saw the circles widening round the body as it

bobbed up and down. Or, perhaps, lying passive on the fine sand at the bottom of the ocean, with the seaweed and coral clinging to his hair. And, ever and anon, the music from the ball room floated in and mingled with the scent of the flowers. They were playing the "Pepita Polka." Oh! the agony of those moments—the time how it lagged—how each minute was an hour. How every sound jarred on Kate's nerves; the very fiddle seemed playing on her heart strings. Suddenly the music ceased, and Kate jumped up.

"I cannot remain here, Judy, people will wonder what is to do."

A faint colour came into her cheeks.

"I fancy I am engaged to Mr. Gradwell for this dance."

"Then let us go," said Judy; "you are not short of courage, Kate."

Kate smiled. They met Julius coming to take them, and together they reached the ball room.

The sad news had not spread, and the people were dancing and enjoying themselves. Soon Kate was laughing too, but only from her lips, not from her heart. Music was to be heard in the drawing-room; some were there, and there Augustus Gradwell proposed to poor bewildered Kate they should go. Yes, she should like to go.

Miss Chuckels was settling herself at the piano, about to sing. Now, Ellen Chuckels had not a bad voice, only she strained it too much, and pulled the most agonizing faces. But she could not play, her long fingers sprawled over the keys in every direction but the right one, and she had no ear. But she could sing if anyone played her accompaniment. However, on this occasion, there was no one there to play; indeed, she had no music with her; so she sat down to do it from memory. Of all the songs known to the admiring public, she chose "Ave Maria." Not one

single note of the accompaniment was correct; yet she was not daunted, and waded through it in the most affected style. The action of the left hand was grand. It nearly drove Kate Calvert mad; it was one continual "Hear a Maiden's Prayer."

Kate could say nothing but one word—"George." It was all the prayer she could say for many a day. But it was sufficient.

She knew now how she loved him, now that he rested in his watery grave with the cool green waves splashing about, hushing him to sleep with their ceaseless song. She wondered how he had died, if he had had time to say one little prayer, if the "Sea Gull" had gone down in the night? or in the morning? or when? She hungered for one word, one sign, and she lay tossing about through the small hours of the night with her eyes wide open. She kept the light burning; she could not bear to be alone,

and sometimes the gay scene which she had left only a few hours danced on the wall, and she saw all the people fluttering about, and heard again the awful words; aye, and saw them; there they were before her eyes, in great red letters the length of the room:—"The 'Sea Gull' has gone to the bottom, and not a soul on board saved!"

"Not a soul on board saved!" Say, not a body. Take courage, Kate, you don't know how many of those on board the "Sea Gull" have "winged their flight to heaven," and perhaps he was one among them. Perhaps his black eyes are looking through the clouds now and watching you grieve for him, who, with all his sins blotted out, is peaceful and happy!

Half-past eight, and breakfast is being taken at Wild Wood. All are down to it excepting Lois. They are talking, as a matter of consequence, of George Hardwick.

"It is awful, poor young man," said the Squire. "He was so young; sad thing, very."

"I recollect him perfectly," remarked Madam, "he was extremely handsome; his dark beauty was so uncommon. But he was very wild, I heard someone say; a bad young man."

"No, mother, that is wrong," said Durill. "George was rather wild, but not bad; he made no attempt to screen his doings, and spake his intentions openly. There was no bad in poor George, but plenty of go. It will be a sad cut for his brother; they were much attached. I must go and see him to-day."

"What sort of a party was it, Julius," asked May.

"Very nice; some pretty girls there; Kate and Ruby Calvert among them; but Lois was undoubtedly the belle."

"Of course," said Madam, composedly.

"Have I dreamt it, or is it true, that Blackett is down suddenly?" asked Judy.

"Eh! what!" said the Squire. "Blackett, is he here?"

"Yes, sir, I believe so," answered Durill, glancing at May.

"Umph!" grunted the Squire.

During the morning Durill went down to Felton Cottage and saw Captain Hardwick, who was dreadfully cut up about George, his young brother.

"Godwin is a good fellow, May," said Durill on his return, as he lay back in his chair, smoking. "He cared awfully about George, and had done so much to put things easy for him. Well, well, it was to be, I suppose."

"How did it happen, Durill, did he tell you?"

"Yes, all there is to tell. No one knows anything about it; her boats have been picked up and several planks, and there is not a doubt but what all are lost. She must have struck on some rock; the account will be in to-day's paper.

Hand it over, May. Ah! here it is. 'Loss of the "Sea Gull."' There were thirty passengers on board; I thought there were more. I don't see Hardwick's name, though. Yes, here it is, and his brother officer's, too:—

"'George Henry Hilton Hardwick, Lieutenant in the — Highlanders.

"'Herbert Edward Grenville, Ensign, — Highlanders.'

Poor fellows, what a pity it is they missed the ship the regiment went out in. The 'Princess Alice' is all right. It really seems like fate. Godwin was telling me to-day how unwilling poor George was to go. He dilly dallied so that Godwin thought he would never be ready. I wish he had not been ready, poor fellow. I sha'n't forget him, the night of Archer's dinner party, how amused he was with that fool of a Tommy Chuckels; he laughed till the tears rolled down his cheeks. Poor George!"

"The nice ones always go first, Durill. He never gave us his carte."

"No, he did not; but did I tell you he left his little dog Theo for Kate Calvert?"

"No, did he?"

"Yes, Godwin told me to-day, and he sent it to her a little time back. I fancy he was smitten."

"Yes, I believe so, too, and Judy said something about Kate looking pale last night. I hope it is not very hard for her, poor thing."

"I hope not, but there are queer things in this world. Did you hear how Ruby looked, May?"

May smiled. "Yes, Crispin says she looked cross?"

This seemed to afford Durill pleasure; he laughed, and murmured something about "silly child."

CHAPTER XI.

One day Julius came in hurriedly, and caught hold of May, who had Evelyn in her arms eating a piece of cake.

"Guess the news, May?"

"Can't—don't make so many crumbs, pet. What is it?"

"Charles Blackett is going to be married!"

"Indeed, who to?"

"Maggie Hopwood; and you are to be a bridesmaid, May."

May had set Evelyn down and gone nearer to Julius.

"Are you sure, Julius?"

"Quite, it is in everyone's mouth."

"What is that? it must be something good to be in everyone's mouth."

The speaker was Lois. Minnie had come up to ask her to go to London with her, and they were now waiting for the carriage to convey them to the station. The hall at Wild Wood was a perfect esplanade, everyone met there, and if two happened to be talking at one end, those passing along were sure to stop and ask what it was about. Many and many a conversation was held around the hall fire, which was always bright. It took a good large fire to warm that great place, and it looked so cheery and hospitable.

"May, do you know that child has hold of your dress with her sticky hand?" cried Minnie, looking aghast.

"Yes, I know, it is of no consequence, I never wear a good dress before dinner, on purpose that they may take hold of me when they have a mind, little things."

"I don't fancy it makes much difference to you after dinner either, May," laughed Judy, who had joined the group.

"You are right, Judy; is she not Evelyn?"

"Ris, Aunty Doody's right. I *could* eat another piece of take, Aunty May."

"I daresay; well, if we see anyone going by we will send to Mrs. Morrison for another piece."

"Then you *do* allow them cake, May?" asked Minnie.

"Yes, if plain bread with slices of apple and raisins can be called cake. But they get very little of that, and never without they eat their meals properly. A little is a nice change and Mrs. Morrison always keeps some for them. She is very good to little people."

"I could not help saying to mamma, the other day, how queer it seems to have children in the house again. I find mine a great tie. I don't

know how poor mamma manages, because she has had her share."

"Don't distress yourself about the mother, Mrs. Calvert. *She* does not get teased with them. They are Durill's and May's children," answered Julius, shortly.

"Well, don't bite my head off, Julius!"

"No fear, you are not like the frog, Minnie, you have not a jewel in yours," retorted Julius, laughing at the one side of his mouth.

"A good thing too, it would be a bad look out if we were *all* frogs, Mr. Clever."

"A calamity decidedly, Minnie," said Julius, joining in the laugh.

"Have you two finished?" asked Lois, "because if so, I should like to hear what it is that is in 'Everyone's mouth.' Now make haste Julius, and use your clapper, as Crispin says?"

"Well, prepare for a shock ladies. The truth

is one of the *very* few eligible young men of this locality is about to take unto himself a wife!"

"Good gracious! it *can't* be that ass of a Tommy Chuckels? if so he must have gone to the nearest asylum for the said wife?"

"No, Lois, it is not Tommy of the deceptive head. That head ought to be taken up for obtaining credit for senses under false pretences!"

"Then who is it, tell me?"

"Don't get excited, my dear; you'll be took the other way presently. It is none other than the Revd. Charles Blackett, and he is about to take to his manly bosom Margaret Hopwood, better known as Maggie. Some relation of his has hopped the twig, and Charles comes in for a large fortune. Now you know the news, what do you think about it?"

There were exclamations from Minnie and Judy, but not a sound from Lois, who looked very crestfallen. Julius, with his quick eyes, saw

this, and immediately arrived at the correct conclusion.

"Sold again, my dear Lois, sold again. I should have thought experience would have taught you better, not to speak of that widely known fable, 'The Dog and the Shadow.' You rejected the curate, and you have lost the rector, and a rich man. You really don't know how to look after your bread and butter. There, there, calm yourself, my sweet creature," for Lois had turned angrily upon him. "Don't take on, as the maids say to each other by way of consolation, when the 'milingtary' are marching out of the town."

"Julius, stop 'teasing, do," said May, laughing, "they ought to engage you as 'tormentor.'"

"There is the carriage, Lois, you will only have time to catch the train, you had better tell Ashley."

Lois seemed only too glad to escape, Julius was looking most provoking.

"Judy," said Minnie, while gathering up her dress gracefully, "I am going to Hutton's, I will get your necklace, it will surely be ready by now."

Judy started visibly, and went ashy pale, and exclaimed hurriedly—

"No, Minnie, I had rather you did not. I prefer getting it myself."

"Nonsense," called Minnie from the door, as she passed out.

Attention was taken from Judy by Evelyn's cries; she had clambered into Judy's arms, and Judy had, in her fright, dropped the child. Julius instantly abandoned his intention of seeing his sisters to the carriage, and leaving Blake to it took the sobbing child up. He folded her to him, and soothed the little thing almost as well as Durill could have done, and when her sobs became less violent, he turned to Judy, who stood with a white, terrified face, seeming scarcely conscious that she was the cause of all the uproar.

"Judy, you are extremely careless, you are not fit to hold a child; the idea of dropping her out of your arms plump on the floor. It is fortunate she is not hurt."

"I am very sorry, indeed I am, Julius, but I felt startled just then—very stupid of me, I know, but I really could not help it. May, do you think the child is hurt?"

"No," answered May, composedly. "Put her down, Julius. Evelyn, my dear, stand down, you are not hurt, only shaken and frightened. That's it, is it not?"

The fat little thing was not hurt, May was quite right; she stood quite firmly on her short legs, and presently began to dance round, much to Judy's relief and Julius' amusement.

"Thank heaven she is no worse," ejaculated Judy. "Aunty will never hold you in her arms again, Evelyn."

"Vy not?" asked that little lady, who was

actively engaged wriggling her small body on the rug before the dogs.

"Yes, indeed, why not, Aunt Judy?" asked Julius.

"Oh! because I am so careless; I might, as you said, Julius, have hurt her seriously, and it has given me such a fright. I don't know which was the most terrified, the child or myself."

"But what made you drop her, Judy?"

"I don't know—I think I forgot I had her—but it shall never happen again."

"Tut! my dear Judy, don't take it to heart so," said May, smiling. "Evelyn has plenty of fat—it takes a good time to reach her bones. Only men seem to imagine children to be made of Bohemian glass."

"You are the right sort for little people, May. They won't get nesh with you," answered Julius.

"Here, Evelyn shall I give you a ride on my back?"

"Pease, Uncle Doolius."

"May, hoist her up, there's a good girl."

The good-natured man gallopped up and down for some time, till he declared he could not go another step. So May came forward and took laughing Evelyn into her own arms.

"Well, what's the order of the day?" asked Julius, passing his arm round Judy. "If this frost only continues, we shall have grand sport on Thursday night; the ice is thick enough already, only the longer the frost lasts the safer it will become. The Glen is very deep, too, in some parts."

The Glen was a good sized and picturesque sheet of water in a wood at the bottom of the slope. The river ran through it, and every Christmas, weather permitting, the Glen was a noted place for skaters. The Squire allowed everyone to come excepting when they had a skating party, when they had it to themselves.

These parties were held at night by the light of the moon, torches, and huge bonfires. And it was of such a party Julius spoke when he named "Thursday night."

"I think there is something to do with one of my skates, Julius," said May, "it is not firm."

"Indeed! Let me look at it. Stay, May, I will ring."

He pulled the bell by the mantel piece, and William appeared.

"William, tell Blake to give you Miss May's skates, I wish to see them."

"Yes, sir."

"Stay, William," called May. "Ask Mrs. Morrison to please send another piece of cake for Miss Evelyn."

William bowed.

"There, Evelyn; I promised you a piece if anyone came along."

Evelyn bestowed a hearty kiss upon May's cheek.

"Is that for Aunt May or the cake?" enquired Julius, laughing.

"Aunty May," replied Evelyn.

"Of course it is," answered May, kissing the child in return. "It is only Uncle Julius who asks those questions."

The skates appeared, also the cake.

Julius turned one and found it loose.

"Yes, May, my dear, there is something to do with this one; the iron is leaving the wood. I will get it seen to at once. Where did you get these skates, May?"

"Durill had them made in town for me the winter before last."

"I thought so; they are beauties. Ah! here is 'Gunter's' name on them. Well, this only wants screwing a little tighter; they can do it at the smithy directly; I will take it down with

me. But Blake had better see to the rest. Tell him, May, when you see him, dear. I am off now. Tat ta, Evelyn."

"Tat ta, Uncle Doolius," answered Evelyn, with her mouth full of cake.

Lois came back in time to dress for dinner, and before going down stairs she came into May's room, where was Judy talking to May.

"May I come in?"

"Yes, Lois, come in, dear," said May. "How did you get along in London? Left Minnie at home, I suppose?"

"Yes. We have such sweet costumes for Thursday night, May. Just like those worn by the Princess of Wales; mine is blue, and Minnie's violet. That is the petticoat, of course. Such satin, my dears, it stands again."

May smiled.

"I am not having anything new, Lois; I did not think it necessary."

"I did not expect you would. Madame Rento asked after 'Mademoiselle May.'"

"Did she? I suppose she thinks it is time I had some new dresses and things. Well, I am afraid she must wait a bit; mine seem very respectable at present."

"Judy, she has a dress that would just suit you, only twelve guineas, all made but the bodice. It is splendid. A rich plum colour, beautifully trimmed with a handsome satin trimming of the same shade. Minnie thought it would be just the very thing for you. By the way, before I forget," continued Lois, settling her bracelet on her white arm, "we called at Hutton's, and they said they had no necklace of Miss Drever's."

"Did they?" answered Judy, looking wretchedly ill. "It is of no consequence, I know where the necklace is, and that is sufficient. I told Minnie not to go. I will attend to it myself, Lois; you can tell Minnie so."

Judy spake rather irritably, and no doubt Lois thought so, for she swept out of the room without saying another word. May said nothing, and Judy took up the thread once more.

"It is positively rude the way Minnie and Lois behave; they interfere with everyone; they presume too much. But I shall not permit it; I don't choose to be watched and cross-questioned like a child as to where my things are, and I shall let that be understood. How is it they don't interfere with you, May?"

May half smiled.

"They do, my dear Judy. Scarcely a week passes but what I am taken to task about something. But I always manage that they shall go away as wise as they came. I never do satisfy their curiosity."

"That reminds me, May, what was that quarrel you had with Minnie a little time back, and Durill was so hot about it?"

"Why, it was this, Judy. One day when I was writing, Lois came in to borrow a seal with the crest on; Minnie was here. Shortly after Minnie herself came in, and asked me in the coolest possible manner who I was writing to. I would not tell, you may be sure, and Minnie told me she considered it her duty to ask, for Lois had seen 'Dear Charles,' at the top of the letter. Would you believe it?"

"But was there 'Dear Charles' at the top of the letter?"

"Yes there was, sure enough, and it was Charles Cuthbert, Esq., Lockwood Priory, Hants, to whom I was writing. The fact was this, Durill and I write so much alike that he often gets me to answer his letters, and I, instead of beginning 'Mr. Cuthbert, sir, I am deputed by my brother, etc.,' I begin 'Dear Charles,' 'Dear Harry,' just as the case may be, and sign Durill Drever. Durill told me to do it, and he reads

them after, and it saves a lot of bother. That was the truth, and that sneak of a Lois went and told what she saw. No doubt but what she was jealous, and anxious to know who I had got for a 'dear Charlie.'"

"What did you say, May?"

"Say, indeed! I don't quite know—nothing very polite, you may be sure. I lost all control over myself, and actually took Mrs. Mark Calvert by the shoulders and ejected her. At that instant Durill came in, and I made him aware of the whole affair. He was just wild, Judy, and gave Minnie such a dressing, she has never put her nose inside the snuggery from that day to this."

Judy laughed heartily.

"Well done, May, I wish I had seen you. And did you tell it was Durill's letter?"

"No, I did not tell, and Durill would not either. Mamma was appealed to. 'May and Durill had insulted dear Minnie.' It was a

wonder they did not say 'assaulted.' But it made no difference; if they had gone to papa he would have taken our part. I think we are a match for them, Judy?"

"Yes, indeed! I should think so; recollect May, if they begin that game with me (Crispin has had one attempt), I shall come to you and Durill, and we will rise in a body."

"Very good. Goodness! there's the gong, and I have no gloves."

CHAPTER XII.

At dinner various subjects were discussed, and Lois related what she had been doing in town. Presently Madam called—

"Judith, how is this—Hutton's say they have not your neeklace?"

It almost seemed as if Judy's words "come to you and Durill," spoken not an hour before, were to be verified. Here was the game beginning. Judy almost gasped for breath, and looked imploringly at May. Durill saw all, and in an under tone exclaimed "What the devil are they at now?" Madam was evidently waiting a reply and Lois looked quite contented with her share in the performance.

Judy seemed incapable of giving an answer, and gazed at May in mute horror. But May was equal to the emergency; she saw plainly that there was some hitch in this necklace business, and resolved to uphold poor Judy. May recollected how time after time Judy had taken her part against Minnie and Lois in byegone days, when those two beauties were exercising their petty and worrying authority. So glancing round, May fixed her clear eyes on Lois.

"I don't think it is an hour since you came and told Judy herself that they said they had not the necklace. It is her affair, I suppose, and I don't see what interest it can have for anyone else. You could make a decent living as an informer, Lois. Their not having the necklace today is easily accounted for; there are two posts daily, and small boxes are not prohibited; beside, Durill was in town yesterday. You and Minnie have been over-officious, Lois; you never asked

Judy whether she had received it. I am sure she is grateful for the unnecessary trouble you have taken, first to call for it, and then to inform the entire household."

Madam looked indignant, but she dared say nothing; everyone was listening, even to the Squire and old Blake. Lois grew as red as fire, and tears of vexation and annoyance appeared in her blue eyes. Julius bowed to May across the table, a fund of amusement in his face, and Durill leant back and stroked his moustache, with his eyes half shut. He had taken the cue from May, and was quite prepared to swear that he had brought the necklace with him from town the day before. He had not the remotest notion what it was all about, but he trusted May, and was ready to do what she wished. No more was said about the unfortunate necklace, and the conversation was taken up again at the bottom of the table.

"Have some game, May?" said the Squire,

smiling at her. "Blake, the game for Miss May?"

"No, thank you, papa; it is too high for me. Did you go out to-day, papa?"

"Yes, my dear, I rode round the 'Scrubs' and came up by the Glen. The ice seems firm enough to bear any number. I hope it may last. I told Unsworth about the bonfires, and to be sure the wood was dry. There is nothing so disagreeable as a green fire. I suppose you would like potatoes roasted, eh?"

"I think so, sir," replied Julius; "but I hope they will provide rakes this time, for I burnt the toe of my boot last year in struggling to get a big potato out of the embers for some fair lady."

"Kate Calvert?" Julius asked, Crispin bending his yellow head to get a look at Julius.

"Possibly, my dear boy," replied that gentleman, composedly.

A smile spread over the Squire's handsome face.

"I think I make you all too comfortable, boys and girls both; you, not any of you, seem disposed to leave me?"

And he looked round on them affectionately.

"Well, sir, matrimony is a very uncertain state, you know, and it would be an awful thing to get a girl with a vixenish temper. If I did that, I should be tempted to conduct my own divorce case pretty soon."

After dinner Durill popped his head into the drawing-room, and saw May in her usual seat.

"May, love, I want you?" called he from the door.

May at once rose, and followed him to the side door, where a man was standing holding a beautiful Pomeranean dog by a cord.

"This is your dog, May."

"Is it? Oh, thank you, Durill; what a pretty creature it is."

"Yes, miss," said the man, touching his hat; "and he is as gentle as he is pretty—aren't you, Ponto?"

This man was Jeremiah Smith, the dog fancier—a decent man, blind of one eye through a flash of lightning which had struck him one day while standing in the street. He lifted Ponto up, and Ponto immediately commenced to lick his face all over.

"He is as quiet as a lamb, miss—aren't you, Ponto?"

By way of answer, the dog started the washing process again.

"Give him a bit of bread, miss, and tie him to the chair where you sit, and I'll engage in a day he'll be so fond on you he won't let anyone come nigh you. See his coat, miss" (passing his fingers through the fluffy hair), "not yet growed quite; he is not six months old. By the time he is full growed his coat will be that long" (indi-

cating the length of his arm). "He's a beauty, miss, a beauty—aren't you, Ponto?"

May replied that she was quite satisfied with the dog, so Durill at once paid the man and dismissed him.

He caught hold of May's arm, and opened the snuggery door.

"What is it about Judy's necklace? I could make neither head nor tail of it, only I saw I was to take your part."

May patted Ponto and poked the fire.

"Durill, I don't know myself; there is something queer about it, and poor Judy is in some trouble, but she will not tell, and I cannot make it out. I asked her, but all to no purpose, so the best thing is leave it alone—time, perhaps, may set it right."

"But how about the necklace?"

"Oh! that she says she sent to be mended at Hutton's, and to-day Minnie and Lois called for

it, and they had not got it. It is queer. But they must be kept from watching her at present, that is clear. That was why I took it up at dinner, because I saw that Judy was incapable, and she asked me to help her."

May was sorely troubled; she could not betray Judy even to Durill, and she had her own misgivings that there was something wrong. Durill was silent for a few seconds, then he said—

"May, do you recollect Crispin's ghost story? I almost believe that ghost was Judy, though what on earth she could be doing in the Druids' Grove at that hour is a mystery to me. But I did not quite understand her."

"I would not think of that, Durill, if I were you. Judy is surely old enough to take care of herself, and Crispin is rather fond of the marvellous."

To this Durill readily agreed, and the subject dropped. They were standing before the fire

stroking the dog, or rather May was, for Durill was caressing May; he looked wonderfully handsome, that great man all in black; there was a smile hovering round the kind mouth, and even Ponto seemed to have confidence in him.

"What soft hair you have, May?" said he, smoothing it.

"Yes; it is soft, clinging hair that no dressing in the world ever makes look anything. I—" (A rap at the door.) "Come in."

Parker entered.

"If you please, Miss May, I don't think Miss Evelyn is quite well; she is crying, and cannot go to sleep."

"I will come and see her, Parker," answered May.

"I wonder what it is, May?" said Durill, as Parker closed the door.

"I don't know, indeed, Durill; the child must be ill, for she is always so good."

May dropped Ponto, and turned to follow Parker.

"Shall I come, May?"

"Yes, if you like," said May, smiling.

Little Evelyn was sitting up in bed, crying softly, when May and Durill entered the room. Ivo was fast asleep. May took the child and wrapped her in a blanket, and carried her into the next room, where there was a fire; then she sat down before the blaze and talked to the little thing.

"What is to do, my darling—where are you poorly?"

"Here," answered the little child, lying her tiny hand on her chest; "it hurt Evelyn, aunty."

"Does it?" replied May, kissing her, Durill looking on, helplessly, like all men.

May quickly ordered a linseed poultice and some weak wine and water hot. The poor, small

thing was held tenderly in May's arms till she fell fast asleep, and then carried into May's bed. May would not have trusted her out of her sight; her whole soul had gone out to those two little children. She sometimes forgot they were children—they seemed so near to God in their pure innocence. There is something refreshing and purifying in the companionship of a child.

I know one—a certain little girl, with golden hair—a sweet little child, but who has, I fear, the seeds of consumption sown in her constitution. Her parents are far away over the sea, and she has been sent to a relation to be educated. She is nothing to me—at least, as far as blood goes—but a great deal more to me than many of the people who trot round me daily and call themselves members of my family. I love that little girl dearly. She stayed at my home a good while once, when she was very ill, and slept with me. She could scarcely breathe, and her cough was

awful. I used to watch her in the night with her feverish hands lying outside the clothes, and her crimson cheeks, over which the pretty hair would straggle, speaking for themselves of the consuming fire that raged within that thin, delicate body. She would start sometimes in her dreams, and murmur "Mamma, mamma." I remember her crying once for that mamma; I comforted her, wondering within myself what sort of a heart that mamma could have to send that sickly golden-headed baby away from her. I used to hear her say her prayers, queer prayers they were too, yet there was something solemn in their quaintness. She would name every single individual,even to a certain "Georgie" and "Hedia," who had shown her some little kindness. It used to take a long time, because there were a good many. I was often astonished at the child's memory; she never forgot anyone, however sleepy; indeed once or twice she jumped up

thinking she had omitted someone. I don't believe that child had the least idea that anything could happen to anyone after she had asked God to take care of them. And I would have bitten my tongue out sooner than suggested the possibility of a house getting on fire or the grim messenger Death calling for any of them. There was something so beautiful in that little child's faith. Though the wide ocean rolled between her and her mother, no doubt ever crossed her mind as to their meeting, and many and many a morning I was awakened by Annie counting the months on her thin fingers, and rehearsing what she should say to her "dear mamma." They tell me she is coughing again and looking miserably ill. If I mistake not there will be a wider ocean between her and her mother before long, an ocean on which no ships sail, which has only one bridge, and that is Faith. I wonder when that child is on the other side if she will sit and

count the weeks till her mother goes to her, as she did when she expected her to cross the Atlantic? I hope she will count for me. I firmly believe she will, and when my time comes I shall be greeted with a little glad shout of "Aunty." That is such a nice idea, and I like it so much, that I shall keep fast hold of it. Reader, that little child has a place in my heart; it was vacant, so she crept in with all her funny ways and sat down just as she was. And she shall never be turned out; she taught me a great deal, though a little child.

On the landing May met Judy.

"What is to do with Evelyn, May? I just met Durill, and he says she is ill."

"Yes, she is, but I don't think it is serious; however, I shall be better able to judge in the morning, and if I am not satisfied I shall send for Mark."

"What does nurse say?"

"I don't know. I did not send for her; the child is not really bad, it is only a slight indisposition as yet."

"May," said Judy, catching her arm, "May, do you think it is that fall?"

"No, Judy, I don't; I examined Evelyn that night; there were no marks on her little fat body, and there are none now. I believe, if she had been hurt, there would have been some bruise, but there is nothing to be seen. Are you afraid, Judy?"

"Yes, May, I am. Don't smile at me. My heart stood still when Durill said the child was poorly. If it had been Ivo I should not have been frightened. I do not mind childish complaints, it is not infection that frightens me, but I dropped Evelyn out of my arms, May, and I have never been easy since; if anything happened to the child I should be wretched."

"I hope not, Judy; we may not rule every-

thing, you know. But I wish you would step in here, Judy, I want to speak to you."

The nursery fire was bright, Parker had gone to her supper, so May closed the door and drew near the fire.

"Judy, I wish you would tell me what is to do; there is something wrong about that necklace. I know you have not got it, because I chanced to see the post bag, and Durill did not fetch it. I saw something was the matter, and I purposely interfered, and Durill would have said he had brought it if he had been hard set, but, Judy, I cannot be working in the dark; you must tell me or I can't help you. Judy, *where is* your necklace?"

"May, spare me, for God's sake. I am nearly mad. I have not got it, that I may own to, but no more. Don't ask me; don't make me tell any more lies; those I have told lie on my conscience like lumps of lead."

Tears were falling fast from Judy's eyes, and May's face expressed great concern.

"I don't want to force you to tell me, much less to tell lies, but I don't like the look of it, Judy; it is not creditable, let me tell you. There, never mind,"—for Judy would have spoken—"let the subject drop."

And May walked out of the room.

May watched Evelyn all night. The child slept badly, and in the morning she was better, though far from well, so May wrote a note to Mark, and sent a groom with it. He was not long coming, and greeted May cheerfully.

"What's to do?"

"Nothing serious, I trust, Mark; but Evelyn is poorly, and I don't quite like the symptoms. She is feverish just now, and seems heavy, but I expect you to dispel all ailment quickly."

"I will do my best, but your Evelyn is not a strong child, though so plump."

The nursery was reached, and Evelyn found sitting before a table playing with her dollies. Contented little pet. She required no persuasion to make her put her tongue out, or sit on Mark's knee. Uncle Mark was a prime favourite. He had such a winning way with children; they all took to him.

"And how are the dollies, my dear?" asked Mark, putting her face to the light. It was slightly flushed, and the pretty mouth was hot, and the little hands dry.

"Twite well, only Dane is naughty; scold her, Uncle Mark," and the child raised her dull eyes to the kind face bending over her.

Jane was scolded, and Evelyn sat playing once more. Then Mark rose to go, and May followed him.

"Well, what is the matter, Mark? Is she going to have some infantine disorder?"

"No, May;" and Mark came to a dead stop in

the centre of the corridor. "She is not sickening for anything; in fact, I see nothing the matter with her at present. But the child is ill, and you must take great care, but that I need not tell you. Give her cooling drinks, and no meat, only broth, the very best; but no solids. I will look in again in the morning."

"Must Ivo be kept away from her?"

"No, I don't think there is any necessity; what one has the other may as well have. Children are healthier that have the usual sicknesses young. Good-bye, my dear, and if you see any change, or would like me to come, send down, and I'll attend, if it's three in the morning."

"Many thanks, Mark; but I am not fidgety. How are you getting along? I have not been able to go about much lately."

"As well as I can, May. There is more to do than Dr. Tinley and I can get through com-

fortably, but we must do it, so the consequence is I am at it early and late."

He kissed her and departed to see the rest of his patients.

And May went to see Mrs. Morrison about Evelyn's diet.

"Yes, indeed, everything shall be of the best, as Mr. Calvert orders, and the lamb shall have some nice chicken broth and jelly at once."

"Not the table jelly, Mrs. Morrison."

"Bless you no, Miss May, Miss Evelyn's shall be a good part isinglass and the oldest wine. I will tell Blake to bring me a bottle up directly. We will soon get her round, never fear, Miss May. Why, the house would be lost without the darling. All the girls were upset when Parker came down with the news last night, they set such store by that child. When any of them's missing I always know where to look for them."

May smiled and wished Mrs. Morrison good morning. It soon get noised abroad that Evelyn was poorly, and the uncles and aunts came in a body to see "the darling," and bring offerings of toys and sweets, the latter being firmly rejected by May, who kept guard. They all wanted to do something for Evelyn, and Julius went away quite crestfallen, because she did not evince great joy at the prospect of a game of "horses." They all, however, managed to squeeze the poor little thing, and May was not a little touched to witness the tenderness of first one and then another.

CHAPTER XIII.

The important Thursday arrived, the night of the skating party, and to the joy of all who were to be partakers in the sport, the ice was pronounced to be "as firm as a rock." The icicles hung on every bough through the thick woods, and about half-past ten the sun gleamed forth, and a few starved robins and thrushes hopped about in the warm glow.

The guests were to arrive at eight o'clock, when hot coffee was to be served to all, except any of the gentlemen who prefered something stronger. Everyone seemed to be coming. There had been no refusals. Even Captain Hardwick came. He

looked very well in his deep mourning, it suited his grave, quiet face. Only it was a pity it was being worn for his poor young brother. He rarely mentioned George without a tear in his eye. The Misses Calvert were announced in good time, and entered the well-filled room looking extremely pretty. They had no new costumes like Lois and Minnie, and several other young ladies sitting round and enjoying the smoking coffee. They wore their usual winter dress—black velveteen and silk, seal jackets and black felt hats, with dark plumes, the only relief being each a light crape scarf and suitable gloves. Little Ruby's pale cheeks were just tinged with rose colour as she glanced quickly round the room. Kate seemed thinner, and Captain Hardwick commenced a conversation at once, which after a bit shunted into the dreaded and yet wished for groove.

"My young brother George!" This was spoken

of, and Kate appeared more at rest after a while. She felt nearer to George while talking to his brother. Besides, she dared not chatter about him to anyone else, because sometimes the hot tears would rise to the surface and run over.

Everyone had arrived, and the word was given "To the Glen." Durill coolly walked up to Ruby and took her under his wing. He looked, if possible, handsomer than ever that Thursday night. He had on a suit of black velvet—coat and knickerbockers—grey ribbed stockings, and a grey deer stalker hat. He was far too handsome to be at large; he did a great deal of mischief, though perhaps he did not know it. But those big, handsome men, are generally born heartless scoundrels. Too much beauty is a mistake. Don't have anything to do with it, reader. You may go on all the days of your life on your knees worshipping and cringing before one of these mortal gods, and they'll never

be satisfied or think you've done enough; in fact, they think they are conferring a favour by allowing you to look at them. Their appetite for admiration is enormous; they cannot be satisfied; they feed upon it. The love and admiration of one woman is nothing for them; might as well offer a lion a pigeon's leg. They want the admiration of the whole world. When next you see a handsome man turn your back on him; don't gratify his vanity by looking at him. As I said before, too much beauty is a mistake. It is frequently a trap set by the devil, for no one is as good as they are beautiful. I have told you that the generality of wonderfully handsome men are scoundrels, and I believe I have told you the truth. But I am quite ready to allow that there are exceptions to the rule, and I feel glad to be able to tell you that I believe Durill Drever to be one of these exceptions. Now don't go off with a wrong impression. Durill Drever is not my

idol, and I don't worship or bow down to him. I gave him a place in this story simply because he had his place when I appeared upon the scene, and I found him in it with all the others. And for another thing I judge him able to hold that place, not only on account of his great beauty and comeliness, but because I believe him to be a —good man. I don't believe in fascinating devils or beautiful villains; I leave those for someone else to depict. What I want to show is a glimpse of real, every day life. I want my heroes and heroines to be mortals, with all the feelings common to human nature; I want them to laugh, cry, eat, drink, have a decent amount of flesh on their bones, go to sleep at nights without a murder on their conscience, and get up in the morning refreshed and ready to work. I shall not make them lovely divinities, with plenty of money and nothing to do, aquiline noses and romantic faces. I don't like such people; indeed, to be candid, I

detest them. I don't like any one I can't get up to. I am a little squat creature, with high cheek bones, a yellow skin, and a snub nose; they have the same effect upon me as a person with a poor appetite. If there is anything that aggravates me it is a manby pamby person, with a nibbling appetite. They would soon get extinct if left to my tender mercies. They would all die of starvation, for I should neither say "Eat, darling, eat," nor "drink, pretty creature, drink."

Durill Drever seemed to enjoy life, and I don't think he was any the worse for it, and I am sure he did not look one whit less handsome. It would take a great deal of persuasion to make me believe any bad of him—mind, he was no angel by a long way—but he was honest, and not mean or cowardly. His face was the best I ever saw; it was free from vice, and we are told the soul dwells in the eyes. I will back his eyes against a regiment; I saw his soul through his eyes

many a time, and I saw no spot on it. I could not say that of any other being.

When they were all ready to start, Durill missed May.

"Will you wait a second, Miss Ruby, while I go and find May? Has Miss May been down, Blake?"

"No, Mr. Durill; she has had no coffee. James has just gone for some fresh, in case she should come. But I heard Miss Evelyn was not so well; and Dr. Calvert is up there, now, sir."

"Excuse me a moment," said Durill, turning to Ruby; "I will go up and see how things are myself."

At the nursery door he met Mark and May, ready equipped for skating.

"Then, you are coming, Lady May?"

"Yes, Durill; Evelyn is asleep, and Mark says she will remain so for several hours."

"What ails the child, Mark?"

"I don't know, Durill—it is a queer case; there is nothing the matter with Evelyn, though she is ill. I can see nothing, and she has no complaint. I am going to bring Tinley, if there is no change. I will allow one more day—I never was baffled before. Children are nearly all alike in these disorders, but Evelyn is not suffering from any common childish sickness."

"Poor little thing!" ejaculated big Durill, tenderly. "I wish she was all right again; she is so quiet and patient. Well, we had better go; the others started ten minutes since."

"And you waited for me, Durill?"

"Yes, May; I should not enjoy it much without you. But I kept my charge; I did not trust her to the rest."

May wondered to whom he alluded, but she soon saw when he brought Ruby into the hall.

"How are you, Ruby, dear?"

"Quite well, thank you, May. Is Evelyn better?"

"No, I think not, Ruby; the child seems very poorly, but we hope for a change to-morrow. Mark is quite uneasy, I can see."

"Is he? Mark is so feeling with children—he is wretched if anything ails his; but your Evelyn is such a fat little girl—there cannot be much the matter. I met them a few days since, riding Moppett, and Evelyn was so merry."

"She is not so now, Ruby; she sits as still as a mouse."

They had been walking on together; Mark and Durill had stayed to light their cigars, but now they were stopped by a deep voice belonging to great Durill calling out—

"Stop you two, or you will be breaking your necks—it is awfully slippery down the steps."

They stood still very obediently till they came

up, when Durill took Ruby under his care, and Mark took May.

It was indeed slippery—the snow had got quite hardened, and by the constant passing up and down become as a sheet of glass. The sight was truly splendid—the Glen seemed one blaze of fire, and the trees glowed in the red glare, while the figures moving about in fantastic apparel appeared like imps dancing round. The four paused and looked down on the weird scene.

"This brings Dante to one's mind," observed Mark, "and the elect of the neighbourhood congregated down there do wonderfully well for the imps disporting themselves round the fires of hell."

"Yes, you have forestalled us, Mark; you have taken the finest and most terrible bull by the horns. But I don't like Dante, with all his horrible beauty. There are no trees in hell, Mark. I would rather, instead of thinking of Dante, remember what Young says about night."

Durill turned round.

"Now, don't you two get arguing, or we shall be found *à la* Lot's wife, only instead of salt, it will be snow. May is sure to beat you, doctor, so don't attempt it; take warning by one who has suffered on many occasions. But, upon my word, that is a pretty sight, the Woodnymphs giving a ball."

"Oh, my dear Durill, don't; it takes half the charm away to have you mis-place the words and cut it up so. It is not pretty—it is grand, and Woodnymphs will not suit; they never give balls in January. To imagine a fairy scene we want a calm summer's night, a beautiful green wood with a mossy carpet, and a crystal stream rippling through it, with the moon clear and bright over-head. Then we can imagine the fairies giving a ball, and dancing on its banks to the music of the willows."

"Capital, by Jove; I shall get you to come and

tell Lucy a fairy tale, May. She is always bothering me, and I really don't like her assortment of fairy tales; they are all about some frightful monster with an enormous head. I can't imagine why people write such things for children; no wonder they are discovered in their beds black in the face, poor little wretches. I made a regular clearance of Lucy's, some time ago."

"Why, indeed," added May, as they walked on; "I think everything should be made agreeable and pretty for young children. I don't allow any books in the nursery."

"Then, how do you manage?"

"Oh, very well; Ivo is not far advanced, and I have two or three nice books suitable to his age; but all the wonderful tales and good night stories, as they phrase them, I make up as I go on."

"And a very good plan too; I wish I could

get Minnie to do it. I assure you, the general run of nursery books are of the most terrifying compositions, if I may judge by what I read in my own house."

When they reached the Glen the skating was at its best; no one had fallen, and the fires were like furnaces, while the potatoes were pronounced ready by Unsworth, who was master of the ceremony, and doing great things with a long pitch fork.

These potatoes were rare fun; it would never have done to omit the potatoes. Ruby was rather sorry when the Glen was reached; she wanted to keep the big man all to herself—poor child. But he was considerate; he saw to her safety and comfort, and then got in the centre of a giggling set of girls, with Crispin at their head. He was so far above them that they could not see his face of alternate amusement and disgust at their pretty arts and devices. Now

and then his strong lungs would give out a great roar, and poor bewitched Ruby, who was trotting about by the side of Chandos Stilwell, would hear or see nothing for five minutes after. Chandos Stilwell was rather a nice young man, but he did not suit Ruby, who presently informed him she was tired, so he politely took her to one of the fires to warm her toes. Then he left her, and there she stood absently burning every morsel of polish off her pretty boots. Unsworth came by soon and invited her to seat herself on a bundle of faggots. She did this readily, and, looking into the hot red fire, listened to the peals and shouts of laughter that came from the skating party. Presently footsteps sounded—some of the people no doubt. But they were walking very slowly, and talking very earnestly. Surely that was Durill's voice saying "but, my darling." Ruby raised herself off Unsworth's bundle of sticks, and craned her white neck. Yes, there

coming round, where two figures—a man and woman. The glow of the fire caught his face; it was Durill Drever, and he was smiling—smiling at the girl by his side, whose face was turned upwards to his. He was evidently comforting her, for he put his arm round her affectionately.

Ruby did not know who the female was, her face had been turned away, but she saw his only too well. And, besides, would she not have recognised the mighty form and the deep, musical tones? They had paused but for an instant, and then they continued their way and were lost to sight mid the trees and the darkness. Ruby sat down again with a stiff, white face, and a dull pain at her heart. She had a dim conviction that she had risked all and lost, she could not get it back, neither claim any recompense. It was over, and the bonfire seemed to dwindle to a speck. Then she became aware of a pain across one of her feet, and when she tried to stand it

grew worse; she must have twisted it on the sticks. So she sank down again, and what with her sorrow and the pain of the twisted foot, she began to cry—poor child. Not loudly, quite gently—perhaps she was not conscious of it herself—but the tears were rolling one by one down the soft cheeks.

She heard after a bit feet coming along at a quick pace, and she knew who it was, but she made no sign—there was no blush, no smile. That dream was over, and the sweet eyes only dilated as the steps came nearer. She did not even turn her head, though she knew he was by her side.

"I have been hunting for you everywhere," said the big man, looking down at the shape of the little head.

Ruby thought how near they had been when he was doing anything but seeking her, so she replied "Indeed!"

There must have been something odd in the sound of the well-known voice, for Durill bent down and turned the pretty face to the firelight. He saw how pale it was—he saw the tears clinging to the long lashes.

"Why, little one, what is the matter, have you been frightened sitting here alone?" and he laughed. Ruby struggled to speak; she was not going to cry when he was laughing, and he treated her just like a child—*little one.*

"I have hurt my foot, that is what is the matter."

"Hurt your foot! that is unfortunate. Stand up and let me see."

He did not wait for her to raise herself, he lifted her up.

"Ah! it is bad," continued he, as Ruby sank back on the sticks, with a stifled cry.

He raised his voice and called "Unsworth—James—someone come here."

And Ruby, listening, wondered what it was all about. James came running up in an instant, followed by Unsworth and several others.

"One of you go and bring Dr. Calvert here, this lady has sprained her foot."

He stood close by Ruby, asking her every now and then in a low tender tone, if it pained much, and murmuring "poor little thing." He put another stick on the fire to make a better light, and then asked her to look at him. Ruby was very obedient, she turned her pale, pinched face and looked up at him; he started when he saw it, and told Unsworth to hurry Dr. Calvert.

"I wonder how you are to be got home. I must carry you."

"Oh, no! someone else can, and there's Mark, he will—I forgot him," answered Ruby, quickly.

A frown gathered on Durill's brow, which soon gave place to a smile that seemed to say "I should like to see him do it."

Mark came up breathless, followed by May.

"What's to do? Why, Ruby, my dear, how did you manage this?" asked Mark, stooping to examine the injured member."

"I don't quite know, Mark, only it hurts me.'

"Is it a sprain?" asked Durill, who looked very much as if he would like to have the small foot in his own hand.

"Yes, it is a sprain, and a rather severe one too. You had better let me draw this boot off, Ruby."

And Mark at once did it.

"Now you must be got home, young lady; how is that to be accomplished, I wonder?"

Durill made a sudden move forward, but was arrested by May, who, with her ready sense, came to the rescue.

"Ruby cannot go home to-night, Mark, she must sleep with me, and in the morning, if she chooses, she can go down in the carriage."

"Thanks, May; that is the best arrangement if it won't inconvenience you."

"Not in the least, Mark, and I sha'n't promise to let her go to-morrow either. Now, Ruby, you must consider yourself a baby once more, and allow someone to carry you to Wild Wood."

Mark looked round.

"It is a good step, and would require a strong fellow. There's Unsworth; I dare say he would do it."

"Unsworth, be blowed," retorted Durill, savagely. "I shall carry your sister, Mark."

And without a second word he coolly took Ruby up as easily as if she had been a baby, and held her comfortably in his strong arms. May slightly smiled, and, turning to Mark, said—

"Now, you see, it is all settled; so you go back to the Glen, and tell Kate where her sister is, and before you go come up to my room, Mark, and see Ruby's foot. I will attend to it at once—I know what to do."

Mark agreed, and turned his back on them. Durill strode forward with the little creature in his arms and her head on his broad shoulder, and May came at his heels with Ruby's boot in one hand and the three pair of skates in the other.

"What sort of a nurse does he make, Ruby?" laughed May, as they trudged along.

Ruby did not answer; she did not like to say capital, but she did not remember being so easily carried before—the strong arms were like a cradle. Durill looked at her, and gave her a fond squeeze, while saying, compassionately, "Poor little child." Ruby stared at his handsome face, and then at the stars, and wondered if there was anyone like him up there, and if her papa was looking down at them just then. And then she wished very much she could go to that papa, because she was so miserable and lonely, and the tears trickled again down the round cheeks. Durill heard the little sob, and glancing down saw the tears. He hugged her to him more

closely, and asked, very, very gently, "What is the matter?" And Ruby said two words, "My foot." It was the truth, and yet not the truth—the foot had not made her cry. So Durill comforted her, and said how sorry he was it was such a long way. Ruby wished that they could go on for ever like that—she dreaded the time when he should put her out of his arms. She felt as if all the world was nothing to her without this one man, and he did not care for her, or, at least, he cared for someone else better. So Ruby moved her head wearily and caught May's eyes, with the steady light burning in them. She was not thinking of every-day matters just then; she was thinking of a few sweet lines that the scene brought to her mind—

> "But at length the feverish day,
> Like a passion died away;
> And the night serene and still
> Fell on village, vale, and hill."

Durill would not relinquish his charge; he

carried her to May's dressing-room, and deposited her tenderly in an easy chair before the fire. He did not seem disposed to go, but stood a second looking into the pretty face. May came in.

"Are you not going down again, Durill; it is not much after ten, and you will enjoy the sport, besides they will miss you?"

Ruby thought of the girl he had been walking and talking with under the trees; she supposed she would miss him. Perhaps May was alluding to her.

He yawned, and said he supposed he had better go, and wished Ruby good-night, and departed.

"Nurse is going to bandage your foot, Ruby, dear. How does it feel now?"

"Very much the same, May; but it will have its time, I suppose."

"Yes, like everything else. I will go and see Evelyn now; I am rather anxious about her. I won't be long."

"Oh, don't hurry on my account, May, dear; I shall like being alone."

Ruby said the truth, and no sooner had the door closed on May than Ruby fell into a reverie, out of which she was aroused by Nurse Joyce and a maid with cold appliances and bandages.

CHAPTER XIV.

The old woman was skilful enough, she had had plenty of practice with the large family she had nursed and attended to. When the doctoring was over, and Ruby comfortably settled in front of the fire, May came back with a very grave face.

"What is to do, May? Is Evelyn worse?"

"Yes, Ruby, I do think she is worse; she was wide awake when I went to her, though Parker and nurse both thought her sleeping. She looked to me different; some change seems to have taken place during the sleep. I wish Mark would come."

"Is she awake still? Send for him, May?"

"I would, only she is asleep again; but it will not last long. I cannot think what ails the child, Ruby, for there are no symptoms, and nothing to be seen. But she looks to me as if she were slowly dying."

"Oh, May! how dreadful! I hope not."

Ruby's eyes were swimming, and for the moment she forgot Durill.

"I fear it is so, Ruby," and there was a mist before May's eyes too.

About eleven the party came back, and after supper returned in the various carriages.

When May heard them she went down, promising to send Ruby up some supper. She was not going after any herself, but to find Mark. Near the door she was stopped by Durill.

"How is Ruby, May?"

May looked round the room, filled with rosy laughing faces, while she made answer—

"Ruby is all right, Durill; but I want Mark."

"Well, there he is, near the Misses Tinley. Never mind going, I'll send. Here, William, go and ask Doctor Calvert to step this way."

Mark received the message, and instantly obeyed it.

"I am very sorry to disturb you, Mark," said May, as they threaded their way through the people; "but Evelyn is, in my opinion, worse, and I thought I should like you to see her."

"Worse! Bless me! how's that?"

And Mark set off up the stairs at double speed. He bent over the bed, and listened to the sleeping child, then turned to May, and said—

"You are right, there is a change; I shall come first thing in the morning, and bring Tinley. You can do nothing; best let the child sleep. She complains of nothing but that pain at times?"

"Nothing, and that very rarely; she has had no pain since Tuesday."

Mark said nothing, but went to see Ruby's foot, which he said he could not doctor better; and while they were talking, in came Minnie and Kate Calvert.

"Here you are," exclaimed Minnie, nodding her head coquettishly, "and how's your foot, Ruby?"

"Better, thank you, Minnie. Kate, you'll tell mamma, won't you?"

"Yes, dear, and probably come and see if you are ready to come home to-morrow. I shall not like being without you."

"How's Evelyn, May?" asked Minnie, admiring her boots.

"Not any better, I am sorry to say; but I hope she will turn over a new leaf soon."

"Dear me; I pity you, May. I sha'n't forget having Arnold ill. Children are so difficult and

tiresome to manage, and nursing is almost out of the question."

"May has great tact and method, Minnie, and that makes all the difference," replied Mark.

Minnie laughed.

"There, after that, I had better go; come, Kate."

Good nights were exchanged, and they went off, Mark, however, coming back to assure May there was no very immediate danger, and that he would be up before half-past ten in the morning.

There was not much sleep for May that night. She kept getting up to see Evelyn, and only regretted that she had not her by her side. But Parker was there—a good, kind girl—who kept watch faithfully.

Mark, true to his word, came before half-past ten, and brought old Dr. Tinley with him. They looked at and examined Evelyn carefully, and

Doctor Tinley agreed with Mark; he could not tell what ailed the child. He shook his head when May asked him to come again.

"There is no need, my dear Miss May; the child has had everything done that can be done. The cleverest doctor is but mortal, and what that child is suffering from is not within our reach."

They both went off, Mark promising to come up again in an hour or two. The state of Evelyn caused great grief in the house, and Madam came up to see her, but the child only smiled and dozed again.

"Madam," said May, "don't you think Gilbert should be written to?"

"Oh! dear me, yes, to be sure; but I wonder who's to do it?"

"You, I should think."

Mamma did not appear to relish the office, so she left the room without either saying "I will," or "I won't."

They all came in to see the poor little thing, who looked prettier than ever—only very sleepy. Durill was of great service; he hovered about the nurseries all the afternoon, and more than once carried Evelyn for long together up and down in his strong arms till she fell asleep again. He sung German songs to her, in a deep swelling voice, that was like the song of the sea after a storm; and the little child would lift her heavy eyes to the kind face, and say—

"More, please, Uncle Durill, more."

The shades of evening were beginning to draw to a close—though only just four—as Mark and May stood by the bedside of the sleeping child. The little face was marble white, and a slight tinge of blue was visible round the mouth and under the eyes. She had refused all food that day—only taken a few spoonsfull of jelly and wine. The house was very quiet; everyone knew death was hovering near—ready to swoop

down in a moment, and everyone shed tears, for all loved the gentle little child. After a long gaze, Mark drew May to the window; they were alone in the room.

"May, I am sorely perplexed," commenced he, in a low voice; "I don't know whatever ails that child, but the only thing that presents itself to my mind is, that she must have met with some accident that no one knows of. Has she ever been hurt in any way; do you know, May?"

"Ever been hurt? Met with an accident."

The room seemed to reel before May's eyes.

"Yes, there was that fall out of Judy's arms."

May almost wrung her hands in her agony; and Mark waited patiently for the answer. She had better tell him, or he might go and name his suspicion, and then, poor Judy!

"Mark, I can trust you, I know; I don't ask it for myself, but for Judy. I never gave it a

thought till you asked me; but some little time since Judy was holding Evelyn in her arms in the hall, talking to Julius and me, and she suddenly dropped the child on the floor. She cried a good deal, and Julius was very angry with Judy. I examined Evelyn that night, and a day or two after, but there was not the least mark or bruise. Judy was in a dreadful state and came to me about it; do you think it can be that, Mark?"

"Yes, May, it is that, without doubt, the child has been injured internally; she complained of a pain, you know; the mischief was working then. Dear, dear, it is a sad pity."

"Mark, for Heaven's sake keep the secret; it would break Judy's heart, and it cannot be rectified now; say anything you like, but don't say that fall killed her?"

"You may rely upon me, May, dear; I will make some tale out and screen the truth, but it is that, without doubt. Does Durill know?"

"No, I did not tell him; no one knows except Julius, and he does not suspect it is that she is dying of—poor little darling."

May was weeping; it was so sad to watch the child slipping away slowly, but surely.

"Mark, will it last long?" asked May, presently.

"No; I don't think she will live much longer, my dear girl."

It was no use staying, so they left Parker to watch, and tell May when she awakened, and they went to see Ruby. The foot was doing nicely, so Mark said, and then delivered a message from Kate, who had not been up, saying that she wished Ruby would come home in time for tea.

"What do you say, Ruby? I think you had better go; May has her hands full just now, I know, and perhaps you will be in the way."

"No, indeed, Mark," interposed May; "Ruby

is not in my way at all, but, if you like to go, Ruby, I will order a carriage round to take you?"

"Yes, please, May; I think I had better go; Kate seems to want me, and I know I am rather in the way, particularly now that dear Evelyn is so much worse."

"That won't be for long, Ruby; but it is not nice to be in a house when there is that ever unwelcome guest—death; so I will order the carriage round at a quarter-past five."

"Please, May," replied Ruby, in a thick voice.

"Where is Durill?" asked Mark.

"I don't know," said May; "he left the nursery shortly before you came; he is awfully cut up about Evelyn, she was so fond of him, and he of her. That reminds me; where is Ivo? I have not seen the poor little fellow all day. I hope they are careful of the dear child."

"Ivo is downstairs under the Squire's protec-

tion, and doing exactly what he likes; I saw him," answered Mark.

May sighed; she seemed to have lost sight of a good many things within the last few hours.

"I must be off," said Mark, rising. "If you want me before morning, send, May?"

"Yes, I will; but won't you wait for Ruby?"

"No, I cannot; I have to go to several places yet, and it will soon be dark. Give my love to mother and Kate, Ruby."

"Yes, Mark, good bye."

"May, I wish you would sit down with me for a few moments before the carriage comes; I have seen scarcely anything of you, and Evelyn being asleep, cannot need you."

May smiled, and sat down near the fire.

"And I suppose you would say I am sick as well as Evelyn, only hers is bodily sickness and mine is mental. Come, I must not let my sorrow make me selfish and forget others. What is the matter with you, Ruby, my dear?"

There was a sort of mute appeal in Ruby's face as she turned to May.

"I used to confide all my troubles to you at school, dear old May; but they are different now."

"That is to be expected; we must have troubles suitable to our age, and if your troubles are greater, I am older and just as able to bear them now as when we were up to our eyes in lessons at Miss Boult's."

Ruby crept closer to May.

"May, I don't know what I shall do with my life."

May started, and looked at the pretty pale face.

"Do with your life? Why, Ruby, my dear, I am not sure that you will have anything to do with it except follow the path that will open before you."

Ruby looked puzzled.

"I don't understand you, May."

"No; well, this is what I mean, leave your life alone; don't go groping after the future. If God takes one thing away, it is to make room for another that will be better for us. We go to school all our lives, Ruby. You and I are at school now, being made fit for Heaven. The world is nothing but a gigantic school where the scholars are made to learn very hard lessons sometimes."

"But, May, I have lost something—something that would have made me happy all the days of my life."

"I wonder who has not lost something. But how do you know it would have made you so happy, Ruby?"

"Because I love him so, May."

"Oh! it's a 'him,' is it; I might have guessed as much," said May, smiling. "Well, who is it, Ruby?'"

"Durill, your brother;" and Ruby's head dropped.

"Durill!" exclaimed May, in astonishment, "whatever induced you to get in love with Durill, Ruby?"

"I could not help it, May."

And Ruby said the truth. The proper sort of love does not send in its card and leave you at liberty to decline receiving it—it gets into the heart no one knows how; but once in it is difficult to eject.

"So, little Ruby, this your sorrow—this is your loss. Child, what made you fix on Durill; I am afraid he is not a marrying man. Ruby, you are crying."

"May, May, darling, don't tell; I beg of you not. I know now he does not love me, and I must get over it. I should not have given what I was not asked for."

"Heigho! I'll not tell; Ruby, make yourself easy; but what a queer world this is, love in this room, death in the next."

"I should not have told you now, May; I am very sorry, but I feel so miserable."

"What! because you fancy Durill does not love you. He does love someone, I know, Ruby, and it may be you; anyway, I would not fret myself about it, dear. Don't you remember the last verse of the 'Rainy Day,' that Miss Boult used to be so fond of—

"'Be still, sad heart, and cease repining,
Behind the clouds is the sun still shining.
Thy fate is the common fate of all;
Into each life some rain must fall;
Some days must be dark and dreary.'

Have patience, Ruby, my dear; and now it is time for you to get your hat and jacket on, the carriage will be round in five minutes."

The carriage came round, and Ruby was assisted into it by Julius; Durill not being at hand. Then May returned to the nurseries, and on the way met Lois ready dressed for dinner.

"You are early, Lois."

Lois' answer was to burst out crying and sob—

"Oh! May, is it true what they say about dear little Evelyn dying—is it, May?"

"Yes, Lois, quite true; should you like to come and see her;" and May led the way.

"Softly, Lois," said May, as they stood by the small bed so prettily hung with pink and white. It was a queer picture; a dimly lighted room, a pretty bed whereon lay a dying child, and a richly dressed and beautiful girl, with the tears streaming down her face.

Parker was crying too. May drew Lois out.

"Have you any idea where Durill is, Lois?"

"No," sobbed that young lady; "it is so wretched down-stairs, no one says anything, and Durill looked frantic when last I saw him striding through the hall. Oh! poor little Evelyn; I never was half kind enough to her. I did not try to please hear, and I did not want them to come."

And Lois cried bitterly; while May looked on. She knew the storm would soon be over—nothing was lasting with Lois.

"You had better go down to some warm room, Lois, and I shall not come down to dinner, tell mamma; ask her to excuse me."

May went to her room and put on a soft, dark, comfortable-looking dress. She heard the first bell ring, and soon after Durill knocked.

"Are you not coming down to dinner, May, darling?"

"No, Durill, I am not hungry to-night; I will have some tea instead."

"May, I saw Captain Hardwick this afternoon; he desired to be remembered to you, and asked if he might come up."

"Oh! yes, Durill—tell him yes; I shall like to see him. Do you know Ruby has gone?"

"Yes, I know; I met the carriage coming back. How did she seem, May?"

"Her foot is going on nicely, Mark says; she did not leave any message for you, Durill."

"I did not expect she would. I thought her rather strange last night; it was caused by the pain of her foot, no doubt."

How May longed to tell him of Ruby's confession, but she could not break her promise.

"There's the gong; make haste, Durill."

"Plenty of time, my dear; give me a kiss before I go. I shall come and sit with you."

May watched him off, and then went back to her dressing-room, and set about some work. The dinner table looked anything but cheerful. Everyone looked sad, and Lois' eyes were quite red.

"Where's May?" sharply asked the Squire.

"She does not wish for any dinner, papa," said Lois; "she told me to ask mamma to excuse her."

"Poor May; she takes Evelyn's illness very

much to heart," added the Squire. "How is the child now; does anyone know?"

"Just the same, sir," said Blake; "she does nothing but sleep."

Ivo sat next to Julius; he was so pretty and amiable, and took just what they gave him. He asked after his dear little sister, and silently dropped some tears into his plate. Dinner passed off heavily enough, and before tea Durill went up armed with a special request from the Squire that May would come down for a few moments, and drink a cup with him.

"Then I suppose I must. Evelyn has just been awake, and taken a spoonful of broth, so she won't want me for a little while."

She asked Durill to wait while she smoothed her hair, and then she went down with him.

"Glad to see you, May, my dear; and how is Evelyn?"

"Just the same, papa; she will never be any better in this world."

No one said anything, and the Squire drew May fondly to him, and stroked her head. May did not stay long; but before going up-stairs she had a little play with Ponto. The pretty animal had got much attached to his mistress, and May found him curled up on the rug before the snuggery fire, whining disconsolately.

"Ponto and I miss you dreadfully, May," said Durill, who had followed her in. "And my papers are in terrible disorder, and no end of letters to answer. May, do you really think Evelyn will die?"

"Oh! yes, Durill, I thought you knew it; the child cannot live. I wonder if mamma has written to Gilbert."

"Well, if she has not it is too late now, it is long past post time."

"Lie down, Ponto; there's a good dog. I must go now, Durill."

"Are you going to sit up to-night, May?"

"Yes, Parker was up nearly all last night, and it is my turn to-night."

"Then I shall sit up with you, my dear; so you may expect me. Now, not a single word because I am coming."

END OF VOL. II.

T. C. NEWBY, 30, Welbeck Street, Cavendish Square, London.

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